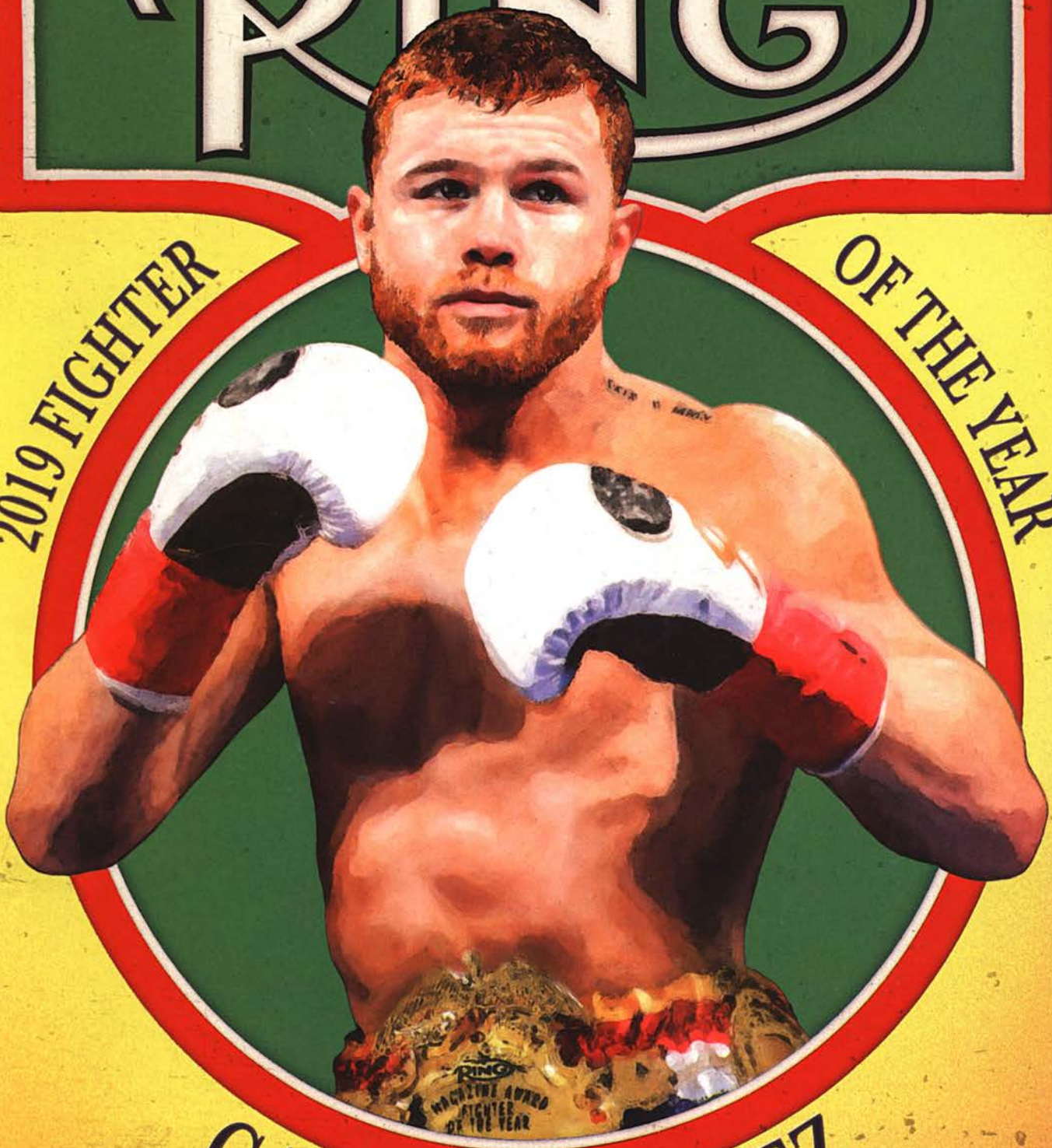
YEAR-END AWARDS ISSUE

THE BIBLE OF BOXING

MARCH 2020

The RING



2019 FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

CANELO ALVAREZ

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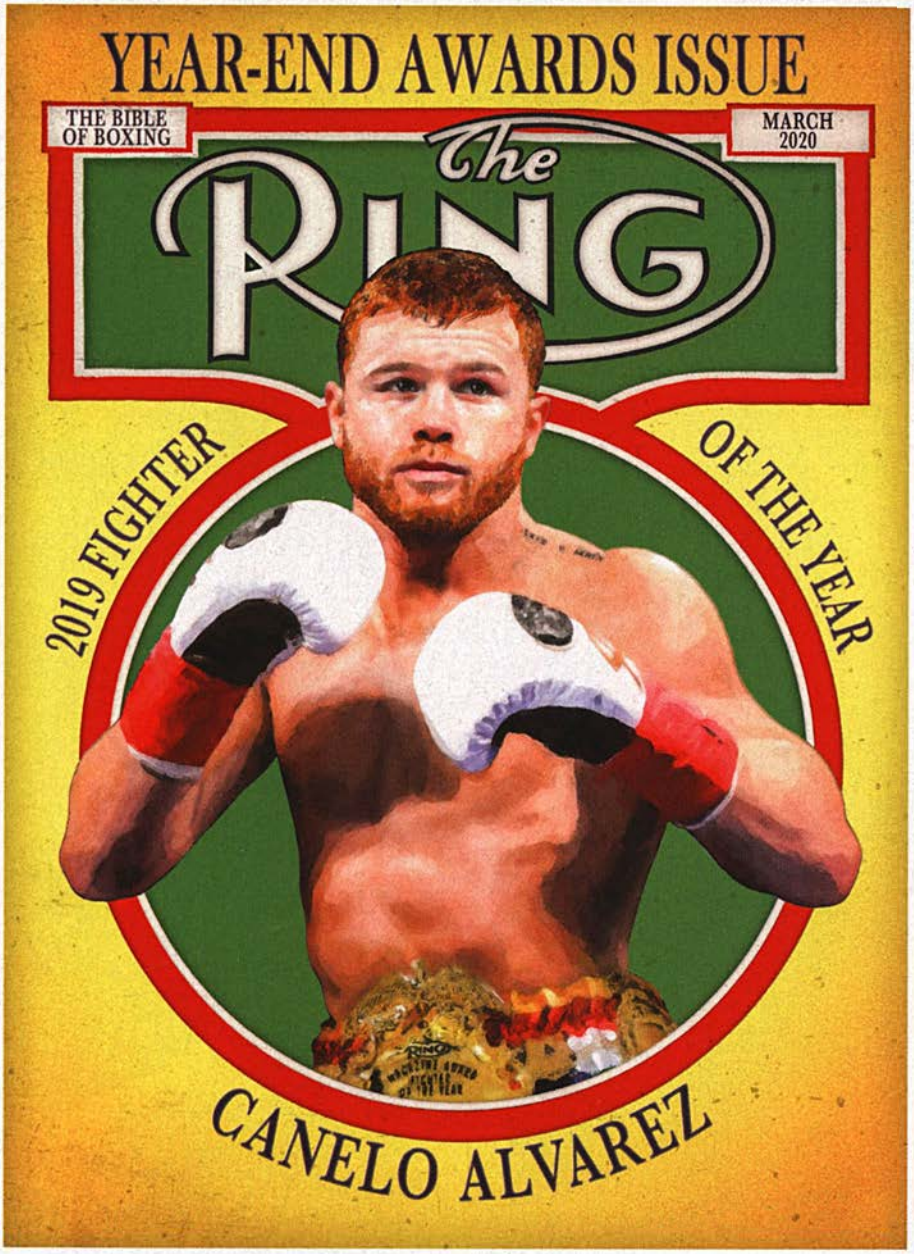

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Canelo Alvarez won 160- and 175-pound titles in 2019.

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OPENING SHOT

It took Terence Crawford some time to get into full "fury mode" vs. Egidijus Kavaliauskas, who had moments in Rounds 2 and 3 (when he could have been credited with a knockdown), but once the defending WBO welterweight titleholder set his bad intentions, he systematically broke down the two-time Lithuanian Olympian to a ninth-round stoppage.

PHOTO BY AL BELLO

Fans expected more from Andy Ruiz and Anthony Joshua during their rematch..

WASTED OPPORTUNITY

There are two types of fighters who win world championships: those for whom winning the title is the beginning of the dream, and those for whom it is the end of the dream. Andy Ruiz, who in the space of six months Buster Douglased himself to 283 pounds, is in the latter. It's really a pity, after scoring a potential Upset of the Year and getting up and staggering and knocking down the champion in a potential Round of the Year *[Editor's note: You called them both!*], Ruiz had the talent to extend his Rocky moment into title defenses and further millions. Instead, he succumbed to the millions he had, the mansions, cars, partying and fair-weather friends. Now he joins the one-hit wonder scrap heap littered with the Greg Pages, Tony Tubbses and Gerrie Coetzees of boxing.

Brad Morris
Astoria, N.Y.

WASTED OPPORTUNITY, PART 2

I watched the Anthony Joshua fight last week and listened to the DAZN announcers praise his performance as if he had just beaten Muhammad Ali, and I found myself in complete disagreement with their opinions. The DAZN announcers gave Andy Ruiz no chance whatsoever the first time around when he was a less out-of-shape 25-1 underdog, and now suddenly they were praising Joshua for running away from Ruiz for 12 rounds. Ruiz is a fat, short and lazy fighter with fast hands and minimal punching power. Joshua is an Adonis who has knocked out 21 of the 23 opponents he has faced. After being embarrassed in the first fight by getting knocked out by Ruiz, I expected Joshua to come out swinging for the fences wanting to prove to the world that the first time was a fluke. I was thinking Lennox Lewis vs. Hasim Rahman 2 or Roy Jones vs. Montell Griffin 2.

Instead, Joshua used his height and speed and ran away from Ruiz for 12 rounds. He had a completely overweight, alligator-arms opponent not known for his punching power at all, and he ran from him. Was it a smart tactic? Sure, I guess. It worked. But do you remember just a year ago when British fans thought they had the greatest heavyweight in the world who was knocking out the likes of Wladimir Klitschko and Dillian Whyte? The guy that would easily defeat Tyson Fury and Deontay Wilder? And then in this huge rematch, he was running for his life against this little fat guy?

What he did against Ruiz worked, but is it conceivable that this same style of fighting could ever work against Deontay Wilder or Tyson Fury? I get that styles make fights, but if Joshua had to run away from Andy Ruiz, he will need a Segway to get away from Deontay Wilder. And even if this style could work, why would anyone want to pay money to watch this guy fight this way, aka Wladimir Klitschko 2.0 (jab, jab, hold on the inside)? How could this style ever beat Tyson Fury, a far better boxer than Joshua, who is tall enough and skilled enough to walk right through Joshua? And I just can't see this retreating style working against the bombs that Deontay Wilder would be throwing at him for 12 rounds. In fact, I couldn't see him surviving five rounds.

Anthony Joshua has his belts back and he will make some great money against a few inferior second-tier

fighters over the next year or two (Alexander Povetkin, Joseph Parker, etc.). Maybe he catches a smaller Aleksandr Usyk with the right punch, but I wouldn't put my money on it. However, I simply cannot see him beating any of the real top-tier true heavyweights ever again based on that last performance. I get that he is a huge draw for DAZN, but I would have preferred at least a little honesty.

Steve Anderson
East Brunswick, N.J.

YANKING AROUND

An awful lot of Americans have been getting very hot under the collar in recent months about the adverse finding in Dillian Whyte's UKAD test from July of 2019. Various American boxing writers have been very outspoken in regard to this subject. And all this despite Whyte passing every VADA test within the same timescale.

A good deal of the displeasure is being directed at UKAD (a government agency), even though when British boxers fail drug tests in the U.K., they are often given a full two-year ban – a recent example being amateur boxer Muhammad Ali. This is fully backed-up by the British Boxing Board of Control, which licenses all boxers in the U.K.

Now, I was assuming all this vitriol from Americans was because they have a much better system in place for dealing with their boxers when they fail tests and therefore harsher penalties handed down … but then I remembered Jarrell Miller! In June 2019, Miller failed not one but three VADA PED tests for steroids, EPO and HGH abuse. So he must therefore be in line for a huge ban from the American drug testing agency and commission … surely, right?

But it turns out that the United States Anti Doping Agency (which sounds like a government agency but isn't) does no mandatory drug testing on U.S. boxers; it's on a voluntary basis that's paid for by promoters. And several high-profile American boxers who have passed USADA testing paid for by their promoters have then gone on to fail VADA testing! Furthermore, some U.S. states do no drug testing at all. (For those of you who think I am making this up, please read Thomas Hauser's excellent article "What's Going on With USADA and Boxing?" on TheSweetScience.com.)

So if USADA does not hand down bans, then surely the U.S. national boxing commission or board does? It took me a while to find the ABC (Association of Boxing Commissions), and the reason why is because they have very little authority and are quite often just ignored by other state commissions and promoters. So, no ban for Miller from them either – "Big Baby" ended up getting a pathetic six-month suspension from one of the alphabet sanctioning bodies. In fact, despite quite a few big-name

U.K. reader Wayne Pearce finds American fans' outrage over the way UKAD handled Dillian Whyte's positive PED test a bit hypocritical.

American boxers failing PED tests in the last 20 years, the longest bans from commissions rarely approach anything near one year, never mind two. Wow, America is right on top of PED abuse!

The biggest disgrace in boxing should be PED abuse, but actually the biggest disgrace in boxing is that the country with more licensed boxers and more money than anywhere else in the world has no "fit for purpose" national boxing commission and no mandatory drug-testing program agency.

Only in America.

Wayne Pearce
Portsmouth, England

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VOLUME 99, NO. 3 / MARCH 2020

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DIGITAL ORDERS INQUIRIES
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or P.O. Box 90254
Brooklyn, NY 11209

THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410), Vol. 99, NO. 3 (MARCH 2020), is published 12 times per year by Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC, P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11209 and additional post offices. Postmasters: Send change of address notices to: THE RING, P.O. Box 433122, Palm Coast, FL 32164-3122. Single copy price $6.95 in U.S.A. and Canada (£5.99 in the U.K.). Subscription price U.S. and possession $39.99 for 12 issues including Canada. Mexico add $5. All remaining countries add $10 for 12 issues per year. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2019 Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@sepublications.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In U.S.A.

UNITY

Some of 2019's best action took place in unification bouts: (clockwise from top left) Spence vs. Porter, Taylor vs. Prograis, Inoue vs. Donaire, Beterbiev vs. Gvozdyk.

Many of the best bouts of 2019 shared a common theme – world title unification.

We were treated to seven fights pitting major beltholders against each other last year, beginning with the junior featherweight clash between Danny Roman and TJ Doheny in March. The 122-pound standouts battled tooth-and-nail for 12 exhilarating rounds, setting the bar very high for subsequent title unifications.

The next one – the high-profile but tactical May 4 middleweight showdown between Ring champ Canelo Alvarez (holder of the WBA and WBC belts) and IBF titleholder Daniel Jacobs – fell short.

However, the thrilling junior welterweight shootout between unbeaten beltholders Jose Ramirez and Maurice Hooker on July 27 rekindled the magic. And from September 28 to November 7, boxing fans were spoiled with one unforgettable title unification battle after the other:

Errol Spence vs. Shawn Porter, Artur Beterbiev vs. Oleksandr Gvozdyk, Josh Taylor vs. Regis Prograis and Naoya Inoue vs. Nonito Donaire.

These bouts delivered high-level skill and athleticism, heated two-way action, dramatic turns and satisfying conclusions. It was boxing at its best, and I want more in 2020. I'm sure you do too, with the winner of the Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury rematch vs. Anthony Joshua topping your list. I want to see an undisputed heavyweight champ as much as the next fan, but knowing boxing politics as I do, I'm certain it won't happen until 2021. The same is sadly true for the Errol Spence-Terence Crawford battle for welterweight supremacy, due to network allegiances and Spence's ongoing recovery from his October car crash injuries.

I'm not even sure if Alvarez-Gennadiy Golovkin III (which would be a middleweight unification bout) will take place this year.

But here are 10 title unifications I want to see in 2020 that *could* possibly happen:

IBF titleholder Teofimo Lopez (left) now faces a daunting but exhilarating matchup against lightweight champion Vasiliy Lomachenko.

MIKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

HIROTO KYOGUCHI VS. KENSHIRO TERAJI – This is a junior flyweight unification that matches the Ring champ, WBA beltholder Kyoguchi, aka "The Dynamite Boy," vs. long-reigning WBC titleholder Teraji, aka "The Amazing Boy." Don't let their baby faces fool you; both are aggressive, battle-tested warriors with brutal penchants for body-punching. Kyoguchi won a 105-pound title in his eighth pro bout, 15 months after his pro debut. He earned the 108-pound championship with a 10th-round stoppage of South African veteran Hekkie Budler in his 12th pro bout. Teraji, who won the WBC title in his 10th pro bout, has made seven defenses and looks stronger with each fight. I can't think of a better all-Japanese dream bout.

JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA VS. KAZUTO IOKA – I know Estrada, The Ring's junior bantamweight champ, has his sights set on Kal Yafai for a WBA/WBC unification bout this year, but the four-division titleholder from Japan, who just defended his WBO belt against Jeyvier Cintron, is more to my liking. I want this showdown, which pits the Mexican champ's technique vs. the Japanese veteran's speed in a battle of masterful combination-punchers.

NAOYA INOUE VS. NORDINE OUBAALI – What's not to like about this bantamweight unification? The Ring champ (and unified IBF/WBA beltholder) gets the opportunity to avenge his younger brother Takuma, who was outpointed by the WBC titleholder in November. It's also an excellent style matchup. Oubaali is a smart, brute-strong pressure fighter with a decorated amateur background. Inoue is an elite-level boxer-puncher who proved his mettle in the 2019 Fight of the Year.

JOSH WARRINGTON VS. SHAKUR STEVENSON – This is a fascinating experience-vs.-talent matchup between The Ring's Nos. 1- and 5-rated featherweights. Warrington, the fierce and accomplished IBF beltholder from Leeds, England, brings mad pressure and volume-punching to his fights. Stevenson, the newly minted WBO beltholder, brings elite amateur class, speed and technique, plus poise beyond his years, to a showdown that is already in discussion.

VASILIY LOMACHENKO VS. TEOFIMO LOPEZ – This lightweight unification is all but guaranteed and could be finalized by the time this column is published. I favor Lomachenko, the reigning Ring lightweight champ (and WBA/WBO beltholder), based on the Ukrainian amateur legend's futuristic style and decided advantage in experience. However, Lopez, The Ring's No. 1-rated lightweight and newly crowned IBF titleholder, also has a unique style, plus the edge in youth, size and punching power. It's a risky fight for Loma.

JOSH TAYLOR VS. JOSE RAMIREZ – This would be an epic "brawl for it all" at 140 pounds. Taylor, The Ring champ and unified IBF/WBA titleholder, is a complete southpaw boxer. Ramirez, the WBC/WBO beltholder and The Ring's No. 1-rated junior welterweight, is an intelligent pressure-fighting, volume-punching technician. The winner would be an undisputed champ, a pound-for-pound player and a worthy challenger for Crawford.

JULIAN WILLIAMS VS. JERMELL CHARLO – Williams, who won the IBF and WBA belts outpointing Jarrett Hurd in what I thought was the best boxing performance of 2019, is The Ring's No. 1-rated junior middleweight. Charlo, who regained the WBC belt with an 11th-round TKO of Tony Harrison, is our No. 3 contender. If Hurd (our No. 2) decides to campaign at 160 pounds, this unification could be for the vacant Ring title, but regardless, it's an awesome matchup. J-Rock is a calculating technician with Philly grit. Charlo is a passionate boxer-puncher who brings Houston heat with every shot.

DEMETRIUS ANDRADE VS. JERMALL CHARLO – Andrade's promoter, Eddie Hearn, has reportedly made Charlo a lucrative offer to leave the PBC/FOX "side of the street" for a one-bout deal vs. his fighter on DAZN in 2020. I'm hoping Charlo, for his sake and Andrade's, seriously considers the opportunity. Both are unbeaten titleholders in their primes – Andrade, 31, is The Ring's No. 3-rated middleweight; Charlo, 29, is No. 4 – and neither can land a significant showdown with Canelo or GGG. The winner of this boxer-vs.-puncher matchup earns the right to challenge one of the division's stars.

DAVID BENAVIDEZ VS. CALEB PLANT – This is a "PBC special" that has been talked about and could likely be showcased on FOX by the second half of the year. Benavidez, a two-time WBC beltholder, is the Ring's No. 1-rated super middleweight. Plant, the IBF titleholder, is No. 3. Both are undefeated and extremely confident in their abilities, which adds to an already intriguing matchup between a power-hitting pressure fighter (Benavidez) and a savvy southpaw speed demon (Plant).

ARTUR BETERBIEV VS. DMITRY BIVOL – Beterbiev ascended to the top of The Ring's light heavyweight rankings (and cracked the pound-for-pound top 10) with his brutally efficient 10th-round stoppage of Oleksandr Gvozdyk, which unified IBF and WBC belts and made him the second coming of Rocky Marciano in the eyes of fans and media. Bivol, who is No. 4 in The Ring's rankings, is arguably the most athletically gifted 175-pounder, but he needs to challenge a world-beater like Beterbiev to prove his talent and mettle.

What every boxer mentioned in this list needs to do (along with all the promoters and network execs involved) is make these unifications happen. If we get half of them in 2020, we'll be coming back for more in 2021.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

MICKEY WILLIAMS FOR TOP RANK

TEOFIMO LOPEZ

Teofimo Lopez needed a statement to get the hype train back on track, and a two-round blowout of lightweight titleholder Richard Commey more than fit the bill.

The intense hype and career momentum that Teofimo Lopez began 2019 with had abruptly dissipated by the middle of the year following well-publicized family drama and a surprisingly difficult distance fight against Masayoshi Nakatani in July. #TheTakeover, it seemed, was no longer trending after his self-described "horrible" performance against the unbeaten but unheralded Japanese fighter. However, the 22-year-old lightweight reminded the boxing world why he was the consensus 2018 Prospect of the Year with a dynamic second-round stoppage of respected titleholder Richard Commey on December 14. Commey's only losses were split decisions to Robert Easter and Denis Shafikov in 2016, and he was expected to test the Brooklyn native with his experience and heavy hands (26 of his 29 wins were via KO). But it was Lopez who displayed maturity, craft and world-class power, blasting the veteran to the canvas with a perfectly timed right hand 40 seconds into Round 2. The Ghanaian warrior bravely got up on wobbly legs, but it took less than 20 seconds of Lopez's furious two-fisted follow-up attack to force the referee to halt the bout. #TheTakeover is back, and a showdown with Ring champion Vasiliy Lomachenko is expected by the spring.

Veteran Showtime analyst Steve Farhood says Martinez is the best prospect in the Mayweather Promotions stable.

NEW FACES

XAVIER MARTINEZ

By Anson Wainwright

Junior lightweight prospect Xavier Martinez kicked off 2019 with a modest fifth-round stoppage of Deivi Bassa. He then upped the ante with two appearances on *ShoBox* – the first an impressive demolition of John Vincent Moralde in three rounds followed by a first-round knockout of Jessie Cris Rosales.

"Those fights were great experiences for me," Martinez told The Ring. "Moralde went the distance with Jamel Herring, and Rosales, (it) took Shakur (Stevenson) four rounds to get him out, and I got him out in 20 seconds. I'm putting these guys away. I wouldn't say (fighters like Herring and Stevenson) struggle, but they don't do it in the fashion I do."

Those wins drew the attention of former Ring editor-in-chief Steve Farhood, who now serves as an on-air analyst for *ShoBox*.

"I selfishly felt a bit cheated, because I wanted to see more," Farhood said of Martinez's most recent win. "Of course, there's no blaming Martinez. He's only 22, but his ring maturity belies his age. And for that matter, his out-of-the-ring maturity impresses me as well.

"I believe he's Floyd Mayweather's best prospect. By the time he's 24, I fully expect him to be in contention for a world title."

It's a far cry from his humble beginnings growing up in Sacramento, California. His parents weren't together, and with his mother struggling with drug addiction, his father was the stable influence on his life. Martinez had a lot of anger as a small child, and his father realized he needed a way to channel it, so he took his son to the Ray Woods Boxing Club when he was 6 years old. Woods, who was the late Diego Corrales' stepfather, has worked with Martinez ever since.

"I was always wanting to fight," Martinez said. "I was getting in trouble at school. Originally I was going to play football, but I had to wait until I was the right age. (My dad) was like, 'I'm going to get you something sooner,' and he put me in boxing. And ever since then, I fell in love with the sport."

With the love came the discipline to focus his mind. Although Martinez lost his first two amateur fights, he went on to win the Junior Golden Gloves in 2010. He had hoped to represent his country at the Olympics, but it wasn't meant to be.

"I wanted to go to the Olympics, but I went to a national tournament," he explained. "I fought a six-time national champion (Josue Vargas); he's with Top Rank now. I really beat him, but they gave it to him. I went to the Golden Gloves tournament and I got robbed again. After that, I was like, 'There are too many politics in this sport. I want to go pro.'"

Martinez exited the amateur scene with a record of 85-10 and made his pro debut across the border in Tijuana, Mexico, at 17.

"My debut was cool. It wasn't the biggest, like others get," he said. "It was a great experience. I won the decision. Just looking back from then to now, I've improved so much. I sit on my punches a lot more, as you can see. I'm getting more knockouts since my debut."

He fought four of his first five contests in Mexico before he was introduced to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in June 2016. Things quickly snowballed and he signed with Mayweather Promotions.

"Floyd flew me to Miami," Martinez said. "I was out there a whole week; I got to hang out with him, see what his lifestyle was like – seeing how much hard work pays off for you, what it does, how it changes your whole life. That motivated me. If I dedicate myself to my craft, I can change my life and (the lives of) my loved ones'."

Since then, Martinez (15-0, 11 knockouts) has improved and progressed. He is on the cusp of being a contender in the next year, though he is looking even further into the future.

"Next year I'm planning to fight for the world title toward the end of the year," he said. "I feel like I'm ready. I'm excited to keep showing every fight who I am, and hopefully next year I will be a world champion."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

WHERE THE RUMBLE BEGAN

Don Elbaum is known to boxing fans as the man who introduced Don King to boxing. A lesser-known fact is that Elbaum is also the promoter who put Michael Buffer in a boxing ring for the first time.

"It was in Atlantic City in the summer of 1982," Buffer recalls. "I was working as a model and pitching myself to casinos, trying to get in the door as a ring announcer. I'd met Elbaum before and been to a few of his shows at the Tropicana. I asked him if I could work one of his fight cards. And he told me no, he already had a ring announcer, but there was another life-changing opportunity he could make available to me."

And the life-changing opportunity was?

"A publicity event for his next show at the Tropicana," Buffer recounts. "He didn't pay me. But Don said it would be an incredible

Michael Buffer's approach to boxing announcing was always suave and debonair, but his start in the sport was far from classy.

opportunity because hundreds, maybe thousands of people would see me.

"And that," Buffer explains, "is how I wound up in a boxing ring in a parking lot outside a mall in Pleasantville, New Jersey, on a hot, sticky, muggy summer afternoon. At most, there were 15 people watching. I introduced the fighters. There were a few rounds of sparring. And that was it."

And now a word from Don Elbaum ...

"Let me tell you my version," Elbaum says. "I was using Ed Derian as a ring announcer back then. Michael was sitting next to me at one of my shows and said, 'I could do that.' So I gave him his first break. Michael is where he is today because of the exposure he got that afternoon in the parking lot in Pleasantville, New Jersey. And because I'm such a nice guy, when Michael went on to bigger and better things, I never stood in his way."

Buffer and Elbaum are now both in the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota.

★ ★ ★

It's often said that fighters are the most accessible athletes in professional sports. They might also be the most quotable.

Kevin Kelley: "When you're fighting, it's like an uncontrollable rage inside you that you have to control. And everything is happening so fast. It's like road-rage on the roller coaster at Coney Island."

Roland LaStarza: "No matter what anybody says, you have to live with your own brains. Don't take any punch you don't have to."

Lamon Brewster: "A good fighter imposes his will on his opponent. It's like when you look at a lion and he's about to get you. It ain't about what you're thinking. It's what the lion is thinking."

Randy Neumann: "Hitting other people is easy. Getting hit in the face is hard."

James Scott: "When boxing finishes with you, it really finishes with you."

Micky Ward: "Boxing is a tough business. Inside the ring and outside the ring, people get bruised."

Nikolay Valuev: "If I feel sorry for my opponent, it will have bad results for me, so I cannot allow that to happen. Every boxer will tell you, it's nothing personal."

Wladimir Klitschko: "From nothing to everything is a very long road in boxing. But from everything to nothing is just one short step."

Paulie Malignaggi: "Combat for a living is crazy in general. I don't think anybody who does combat for a living is all there all the time. To compete year in and year out and to have a professional career in combat sports is not only dangerous; you probably have to have a couple of screws loose."

★ ★ ★

A bit of trivia for readers of The Ring . . .

Boxing fans know Sam Watson as Al Haymon's alter ego and the public face of Premier Boxing Champions. They might also recognize Sam's sons – Brandon and Marcus – who are often in the ring with PBC fighters on fight night. What most fans don't know, though, is that Brandon Watson played Major League Baseball.

Brandon reached the major leagues as an outfielder in 2005. Shuttling between the majors and minors, he appeared in 39 games for the Washington Nationals over the course of three seasons and one game for the Cincinnati Reds. He had 86 at bats, one home run, and a career batting average of .198. Don't scoff at those numbers. The fact that he played Major League Baseball means that he was one of the best baseball players in the world.

★ ★ ★

Let the imagination wander and one can imagine a film version of *Alice in Wonderland* with several boxing promoters in key roles, most notably: Don King (The Cheshire Cat), Bob Arum (The Hookah-Smoking Caterpillar) and Lou DiBella (The Mad Hatter).

★ ★ ★

And to conclude with a final note on Michael Buffer . . .

Most of us remember our first watch with fondness. Buffer's memory of his first watch is tinged with sadness.

"It was a Timex and I loved it," he recalls. "My parents gave it to me when I was 10 years old. It had a white face with some kind of silver-colored case and a black strap. One day, not long after I got it, I went swimming in a public park in Green Lake, Pennsylvania, and forgot to take it off. When I got out of the water, I realized what I'd done."

What happened next was inevitable.

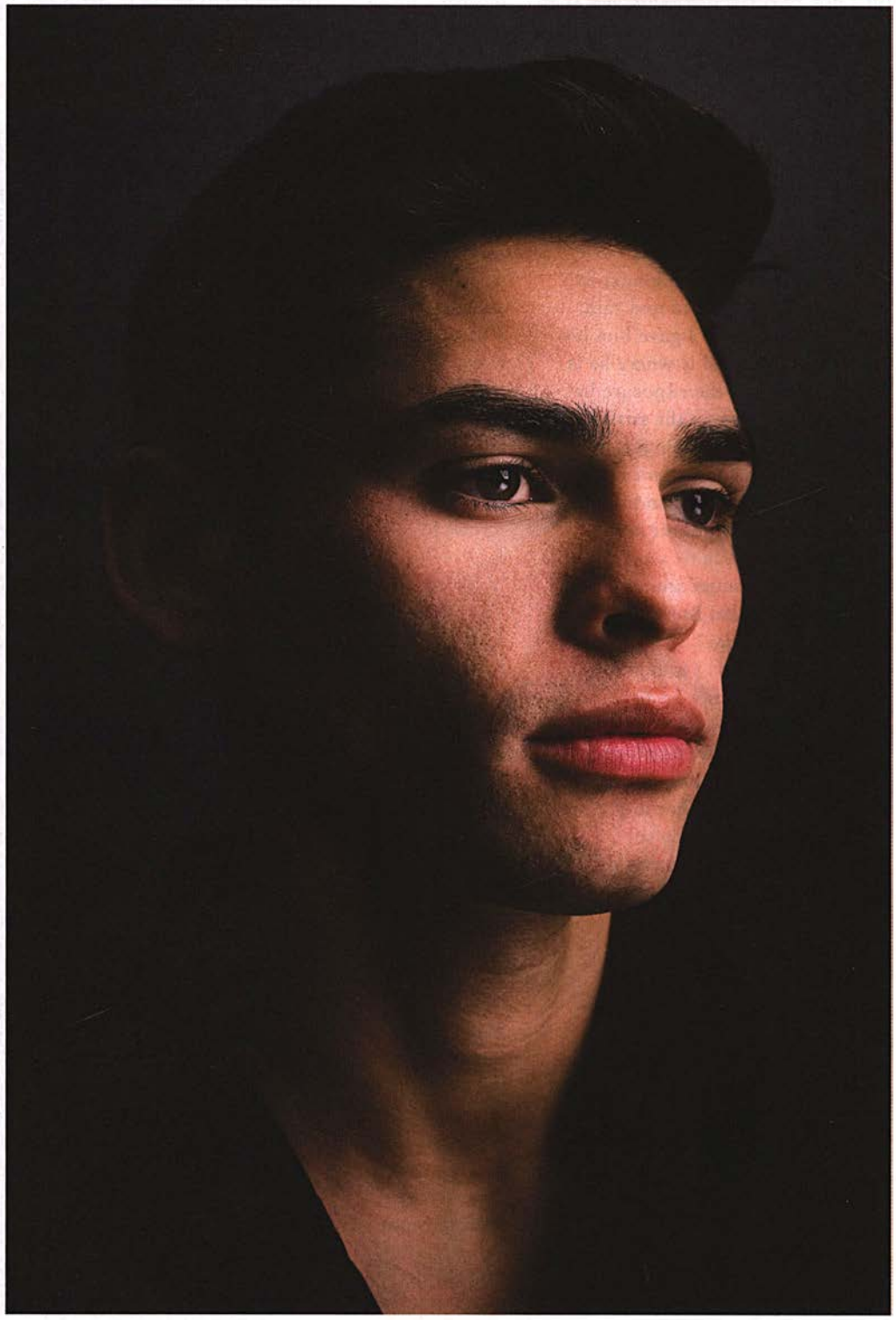
"The face fogged up," Buffer continues. "The hands stopped moving. I was heartbroken. The watch didn't work anymore and I still wore it for a few weeks before I got rid of it. I was absolutely devastated. For 35 or 40 years after that, every time I went swimming or took a shower or bath, I checked my wrist instinctively to make sure I wasn't wearing my watch."

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

THE PROSPECTS

THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**
TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

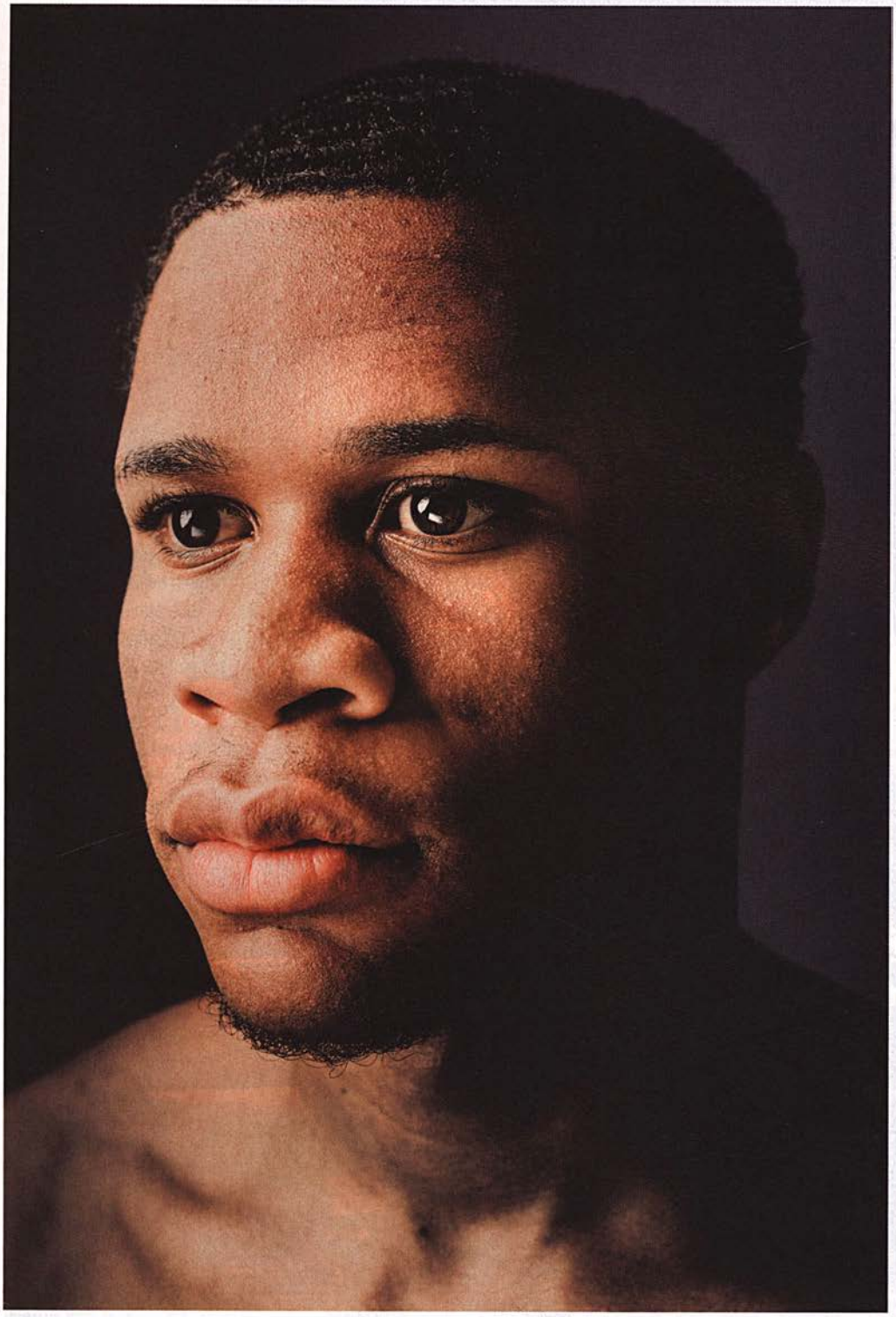


Devin Haney and Ryan Garcia ply their trade on DAZN and are in different stages of development as fighters and as commercial attractions.

Haney, thanks to some silly political maneuvering, was awarded the WBC world lightweight title. What's not silly is his skill as a fighter. Devin is undefeated in 24 outings and likely to make his way onto more than a few pound-for-pound lists in the near future. He has "the look."

Garcia is undefeated in 19 fights. More significantly from a marketing point of view, he has 4.4 million Instagram followers. That's an extraordinary number and a potent commercial base. On November 2, Ryan scored a dramatic first-round knockout of Romero Duno on the undercard of Sergey Kovalev vs. Canelo Alvarez. That made it clear that he's a blue-chip prospect, not just a pretty-boy Instagram phenomenon.

Wojtek Urbanek photographed Haney and Garcia under



very different circumstances. In the first instance, he'd set up his equipment in Victor Conte's hotel room in New York, and Devin came by for a quick photo shoot. In two nights, he would be fighting Zaur Abdullaev at Madison Square Garden. Urbanek had only two minutes to work with him.

"Victor had told me all about the process he was going through with Devin," Wojtek remembers. "The conditioning, his diet. And in my mind, I'd built up a picture of some sort of a machine. Then the door opened, and someone I wasn't expecting was there. He was smaller than I had imagined, and he was with his father, so I saw the son as much as the fighter. He was polite but very focused. And because of the fight, he was somewhere else in his mind."

Two months later, Urbanek was in Las Vegas for Kovalev-Canelo and set up backstage prior to the weigh-in.

"Someone brought Ryan over," Wojtek recalls. "He was with a crowd of people, the entourage, and he was in the middle. But he had a presence. He stood out. When I started shooting, it felt like I was on the set of a movie with an actor. I had to remind myself that this was a fighter. Then, the next night, the fight came and I saw a completely transformed person. I said to myself, 'OK, now I see the fighter.'"

Haney and Garcia are each 21 years old. They both fight at 135 pounds. Years ago, Haney-Garcia would have been inevitable. In today's world of boxing, who knows if it will happen?

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.

RATINGS SUMMARY

The Ring Ratings through fights as of December 14, 2019

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

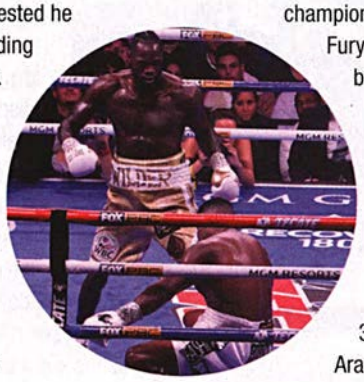
BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Egidijus Kavaliauskas has the nickname "Mean Machine," but that fighting moniker is a better fit with Terence Crawford, who seems to relish punishing his opponents.

POUND FOR POUND

Unrepentant dismantler that he is, Terence Crawford (No. 4 last month) did what he was supposed to do against Egidijus Kavaliauskas at Madison Square Garden, stopping the Lithuanian to increase his knockout streak to seven. It wasn't as easy as some expected, though. Kavaliauskas started out tentatively against the lethal Nebraskan, who prowled in his southpaw stance with an air that suggested he was looking forward to standing over his crumpled opponent. But by the third round, "Mean Machine" had decided to open up and started landing some big punches. Crawford even went to a knee under fire, but maybe the ref was as surprised as the rest of us and didn't see the knockdown for what it was.

Probably a little mad at himself for the "slip" and the unexpected amount of success Kavaliauskas was having, Crawford switched to orthodox and kicked his aggression up a notch, landing a sweeping right for a knockdown in Round 7 and continuing the beating until two more knockdowns brought the fight to a close in Round 9. It was a good win for Crawford, but nobody on the Ring Ratings Panel believed it should change his position on the pound-for-pound list.



KO artist Deontay Wilder remained No. 2 in the heavyweight rankings.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Whatever he's like outside of the ropes, Luis Ortiz isn't known for being the most emotional guy during fights, so it was shocking to see a rare smile one moment and a look of pure horror the next – expressions separated from each other by one huge right cross from Deontay Wilder in the seventh round. The Knockout of the Year tied a bow on the rivalry between these two men (their first meeting in March 2018 ended with a 10th-round stoppage for Wilder), but it had no effect on the ratings. Ortiz remained at No. 6 after winning all three judges' scorecards for six full rounds, a level of performance that would serve him well against any rated heavyweight without a howitzer attached to his shoulder.

The Ortiz win means Wilder (No. 2) owns Tyson Fury (No. 1) in the level of recent opposition department, but Fury is also the guy who most members of the Ratings Panel feel outboxed Wilder in their December 2018 draw. Their positions in the ratings will be irrelevant soon enough, though; with the Wilder-Fury rematch set for February 22, barring another inconclusive result, we'll have a Ring heavyweight champion for the first time since Fury was stripped of the belt in 2018 after going two-and-a-half years without a fight.

Anthony Joshua (No. 4 last month) got his revenge and took back his stash of belts from Andy Ruiz Jr. (No. 3 last month) in Saudi Arabia, but the Brit didn't make his own case for being the top heavyweight in the world. Joshua and his team justified their jab-centric strategy with talk of "just get the win and move on," but there were no convincing arguments to be made about how this safe-distance approach would succeed against a boxer his own size (Fury) or how somebody with such a questionable chin is supposed to survive a night in the ring with Deontay Wilder. Ruiz's reputation got the worst of it, though, as the general sentiment was that he'd succumbed to the temptations of his fame and slacked off in training. He dropped in the ratings to No. 6 (lower was suggested) and Joshua went to No. 3.

On the Ruiz-Joshua undercard, Michael Hunter, 31, attempted to blitz a 40-year-old Alexander Povetkin (No. 7 last month) and looked to be within reach of a breakout victory in the first two rounds. Instead, he got a breakout draw after the iron-chinned Russian veteran worked his way back into the brawl and sent it to the scorecards, splitting two judges in either direction and leaving the third deadlocked. Hunter entered the list at No. 9, which pushed out No. 10-rated Kubrat Pulev.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

No changes.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

No changes.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Callum Smith protected his Ring championship with a unanimous decision over John Ryder (unrated), but it was not an impressive performance. In fact, plenty of people thought Ryder could've gotten the nod, but the official scores – handed out in Smith's home city of Liverpool – were heavily in the champion's favor. Ryder entered the list at No. 10.

Chris Eubank Jr. (No. 7 last month) did the uncommon thing and moved down in weight, so his departure opened up No. 10 for Fedor Chudinov, who would fall one point short of a complete shutout over Hassan N'Dam (unrated) the following week.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

After six fights at 168, Eubank's return for his second life at 160 came with a second-round stoppage of Matt Korobov (unrated), who couldn't continue after injuring his shoulder. Eubank took a seat at No. 8, which pushed No. 10-rated Esquiva Falcao off the list.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Kell Brook (No. 10 last month) was removed after more than a year of inactivity, though he is now scheduled to face Mark DeLuca on February 8 in Sheffield. The vacancy was claimed by Brazil's Patrick Teixeira, who was coming off an impressive unanimous decision over the previously unbeaten Carlos Adames.

WELTERWEIGHTS

Crawford held his place at No. 2 while Kavaliauskas suffered a modest drop, from No. 8 to No. 10. And now, as always, the question for "Bud" is whether he can get a meaningful opponent. With all the other top welterweights flying a different promotional banner, Crawford is going to have a hard time getting somebody like Errol Spence (No. 1), Manny Pacquiao (No. 3), Keith Thurman (No. 4) or Shawn Porter (No. 5) to bolster his claim on the pound-for-pound throne. According to promoter Bob Arum

after Crawford's win, Porter had recently shared with him a revolutionary idea: The fighters could decide whom they want to fight and then the promoters would make it happen. Arum, taught by his many decades of experience to recognize a smart suggestion, seemed to think Crawford vs. Porter could be next.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Subriel Matias (No. 7) and Arnold Barboza (No. 10) held their positions with a pair of fifth-round knockouts, the former against Jonathan Jose Eniz and the latter against William Silva.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Teofimo Lopez (No. 3 last month) and Richard Commey (No. 1) switched places – and the IBF belt switched waists – after Lopez totally destroyed the incumbent titleholder, dropping him like a one-legged chair with a right cross and then following up with unanswered power punches well into double digits before the referee stepped in at 1:13 of Round 2. And that means this: Division champion Vasiliy Lomachenko will be facing the No. 1-rated contender – an undefeated, 22-year-old power-puncher – for the undisputed championship. Probably in April. All good things to those who wait.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

As one Ring Ratings panelist put it, "Andrew Cancio's fairy tale was abruptly halted" when Rene Alvarado scored an upset seventh-round TKO in late November. Cancio's title-winning knockout of Alberto Machado in February was itself a candidate for Upset of the Year, and the Californian – an employee of a local gas company by day – one-upped himself with a third-round KO four months later. But Alvarado, who was knocked out in the eighth round by Cancio four years ago, was too much for his old rival in the rematch, dishing out a high-volume attack that focused on a cut opened up over Cancio's eye in the third round.

Teofimo Lopez's KO of Richard Commey made him the top lightweight.

For the Nicaraguan, it was the crowning achievement of an eight-fight win streak that began after a tough period from 2014-2017 in which he lost six of 10 fights. He rose from No. 9 to No. 6 in the ratings while Cancio slipped from No. 4 to No. 8.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

The only Chinese fighter currently in the ratings, Xu Can (No. 7 last month) unleashed an astonishing 1,562 punches en route to defending his WBA title against Manny Robles III (unrated) with a wide unanimous decision. In CompuBox terms, it was a new division record and the sixth-highest number ever recorded by the punch-counting organization across all weight classes. And Xu was accurate in addition to tireless – he landed 46 of 125 punches thrown in the 12th round alone. He's now focusing on IBF titleholder Josh Warrington (No. 1). Xu rose to No. 6 after the win, then rose two more spots when No. 1-rated Leo Santa Cruz and Oscar Valdez (No. 4) moved up in weight. This also opened up two places at No. 9 and No. 10, which were taken by Jessie Magdaleno and Ruben Villa, respectively.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

Emanuel Navarrete held his position at No. 3 with a fourth-round stoppage of Francisco Horta (unrated), and Ryosuke Iwasa remained at No. 6 with an 11th-round TKO of former bantamweight titleholder Marlon Tapales (also unrated).

BANTAMWEIGHTS

After a fight featuring Emmanuel Rodriguez (No. 5 last month) was canceled when Luis Nery (No. 1) didn't make weight, a combination of disgust with Nery's repeated disdain for rules and rumors that he is done with 118 led to his dismissal. Everyone moved up a notch and Joshua Franco came in at No. 10. Further adjustments were made when the new No. 1, Zolani Tete, got a surprise beatdown from John Riel Casimero (No. 9 last month) and dropped to No. 5 (Casimero climbed to No. 3). All those moves mean that division champ Naoya Inoue is now sitting just above his fellow participant in the Fight of the Year, Nonito Donaire.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

No changes.

FLYWEIGHTS

With back-to-back losses in his last two fights – unanimous decisions to Hekkie Budler and Kosei Tanaka – former 108-pound titleholder Ryoichi Taguchi (No. 10 last month), whose career began in 2006, announced his retirement with a final record of 27-4-2 (12 KOs), Once-beaten Filipino Giemel Magramo came in at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

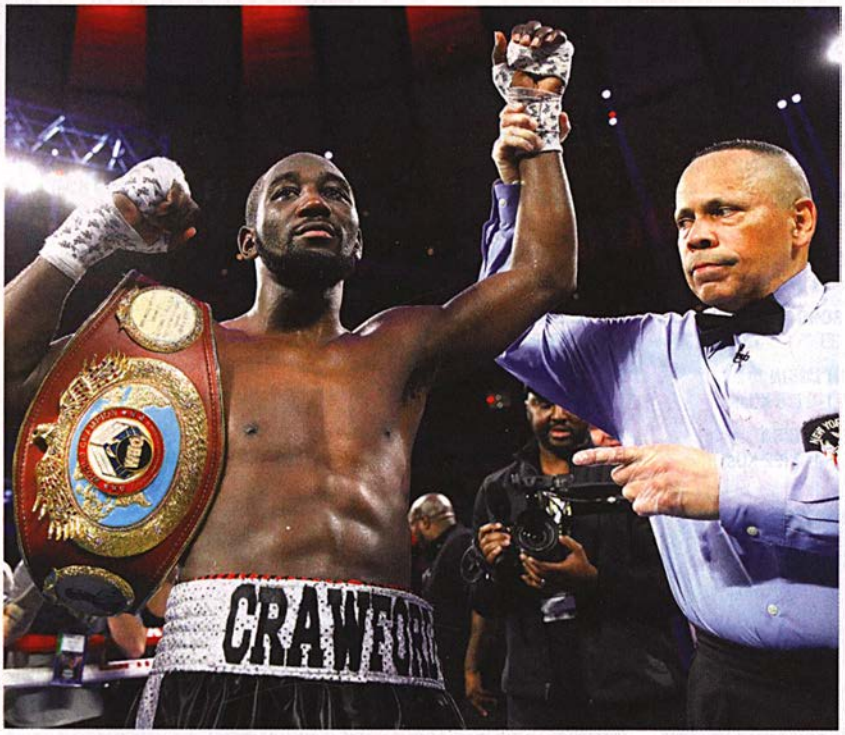
Angel Acosta (No. 6 last month) moved up in weight with a fifth-round knockout of Raymond Tabugon in late October, so the resulting vacancy at No. 10 was taken by undefeated Cuban Daniel Matellon.

STRAWWEIGHTS

DeeJay Kriel (No. 5 last month) moved up to campaign at junior flyweight, dipping his toe in with a first-round knockout of Jesus Fernando Aguirre, and Joey Canoy entered at No. 10.

RATINGS

The Ring Ratings through fights as of December 14, 2019



Terence Crawford remained No. 4 in the pound-for-pound rankings after defending his welterweight title for the third time.

1 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)

3 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)

4 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)

5 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

6 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)

9 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C **(VACANT)**

1 **TYSON FURY**
U.K. • 29-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 **DEONTAY WILDER**
U.S. • 42-0-1 (41 KOs)

3 **ANTHONY JOSHUA**
U.K. • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)

4 **DILLIAN WHYTE**
U.K. • 27-1-0 (18 KOs)

5 **LUIS ORTIZ**
Cuba • 31-2-0 (26 KOs)

6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)

7 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
Russia • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)

8 **JOSEPH PARKER**
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 **MICHAEL HUNTER**
U.S. • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)

10 **ADAM KOWNACKI**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 **YUNIER DORTICOS**
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

4 **ILUNGA MAKABU**
Congo • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 **KEVIN LERENA**
S. Africa • 24-1-0 (11 KOs)

6 **ANDREW TABITI**
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

7 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

8 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN**
France • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

9 **MICHAL CIESLAK**
Poland • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 **ALEXSEI PAPIN**
Russia • 11-1-0 (10 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

3 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
Ukraine • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)

4 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

5 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)

6 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

7 **BADOU JACK**
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

8 **JEAN PASCAL**
Canada • 34-6-1 (20 KOs)

9 **JESSE HART**
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

10 **MARCUS BROWNE**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **CALLUM SMITH**
U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

2 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ**
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 **CALEB PLANT**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)

5 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)

6 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS**
U.K. • 29-0-0 (14 KOs)

7 **JOSE UZCATEGUI**
Venezuela • 29-3-0 (24 KOs)

8 **CALEB TRUAX**
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

9 **JOHN RYDER**
U.K. • 28-5-0 (16 KOs)

10 **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
Russia • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights as of December 14, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4** **JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 30-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 15-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **KAMIL SZEREMETA** Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **8** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **9** **MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 26-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 34-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO** France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 26-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 36-0-0 (27 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV** Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-1-1 (17 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **3** **IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **6** **MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 26-1-3 (17 KOs)
- **7** **SUBRIEL MATIAS** Puerto Rico • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **JOSE ZEPEDA** U.S. • 31-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **9** **MARIO BARRIOS** U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **ARNOLD BARBOZA** U.S. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)

Super middleweight champion Callum Smith (left) protected his belts with a unanimous decision over John Ryder, but the performance left something to be desired.

Rene Alvarado (right) ended Andrew Cancio's "Cinderella story" with a dominant seventh-round stoppage of his old rival.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **6** **RYAN GARCIA** U.S. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **9** **RANCES BARTHELEMY** Cuba • 27-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **YVAN MENDY** France • 44-5-1 (22 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 30-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4** **JAMEL HERRING** U.S. • 21-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **RENE ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 32-8-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **8** **ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 21-5-2 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 62-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **10** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** Russia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 27-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **XU CAN** China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **5** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **MARK MAGSAYO** Phil. • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** U.S. • 27-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **RUBEN VILLA** U.S. • 17-0-0 (5 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **2** **REY VARGAS** Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 30-1-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **TJ DOHENY** Australia • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 20-0-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN** Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)

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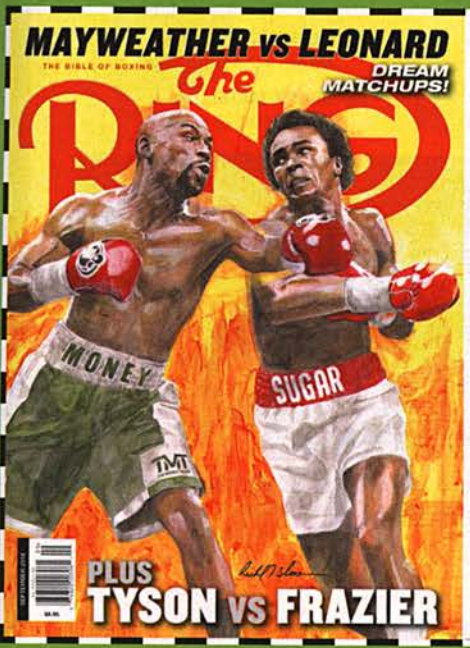

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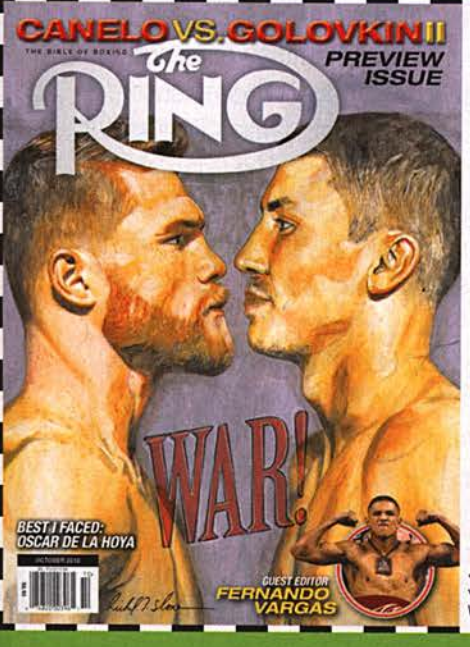

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RATINGS

Through fights as of December 14, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** Philippines • 29-4–0 (20 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 20-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 39-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **8** **JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 22-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **9** **TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **10** **JOSHUA FRANCO** U.S. • 15-1-2 (7 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 40-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2** **DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **6** **ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
- **7** **ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON** P.R. • 11-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 21-2-5 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5** **CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 13-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 29-4-0 (20 KOs)
- **8** **MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **GIEMEL MAGRAMO** Phil. • 24-1-0 (20 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** Japan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3** **CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4** **FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL VALLADARES** Mexico • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL MATELLON** Cuba • 10-0-2 (6 KOs)

Xu Can (right) barely gave fellow featherweight Manny Robles III time to breathe as he unleashed a record-setting number of punches en route to a unanimous decision victory.

Ryoichi Taguchi (right) gave up his spot in the flyweight rankings when he announced the end of his 13-year career.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 54-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 20-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** Puerto Rico • 15-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **4** **BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 19-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **7** **SIMPIWE KONKCO** S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **8** **PEDRO TADURAN** Phil. • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 15-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **10** **JOEY CANOY** Phil. • 15-3-1 (8 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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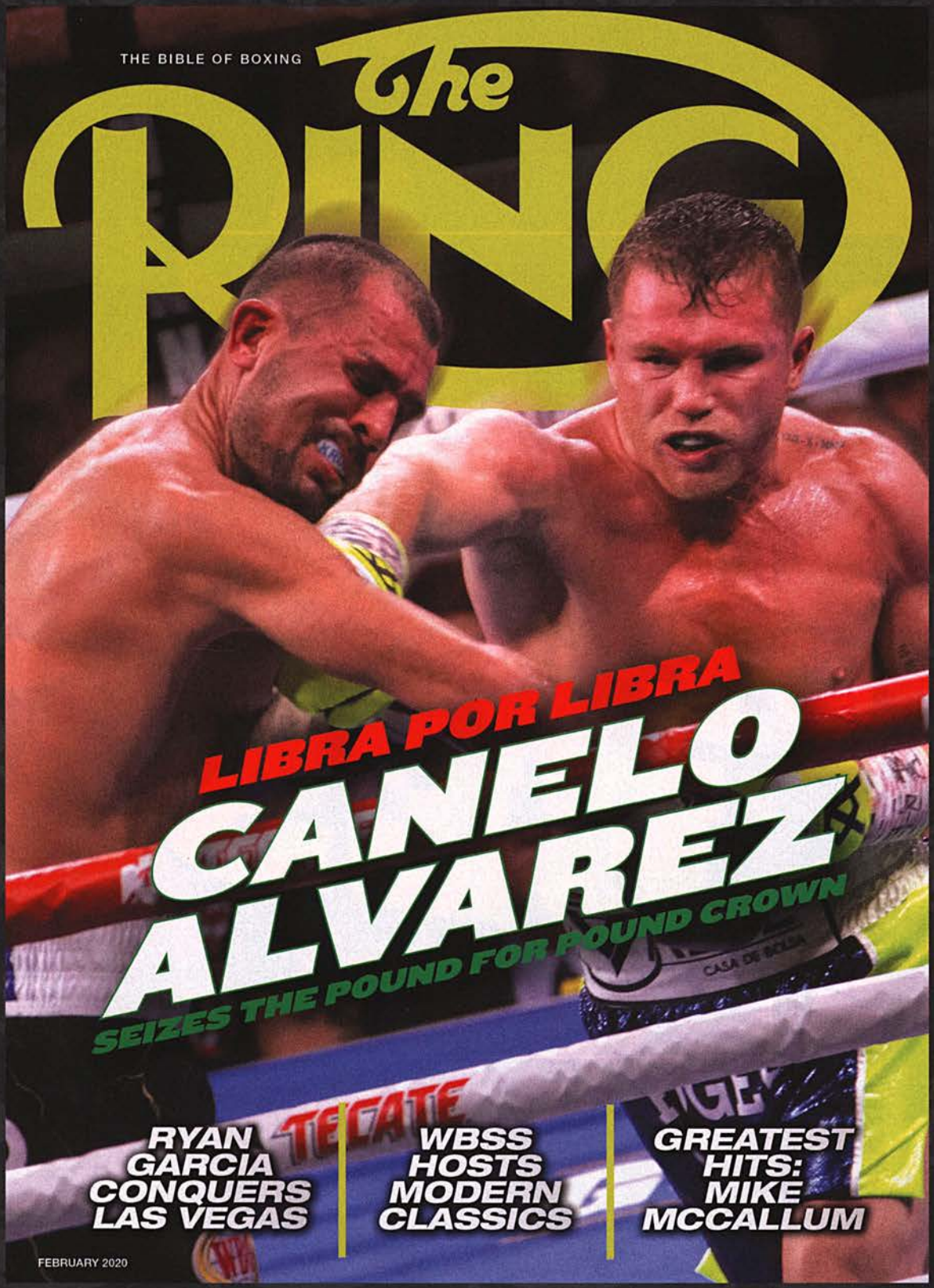

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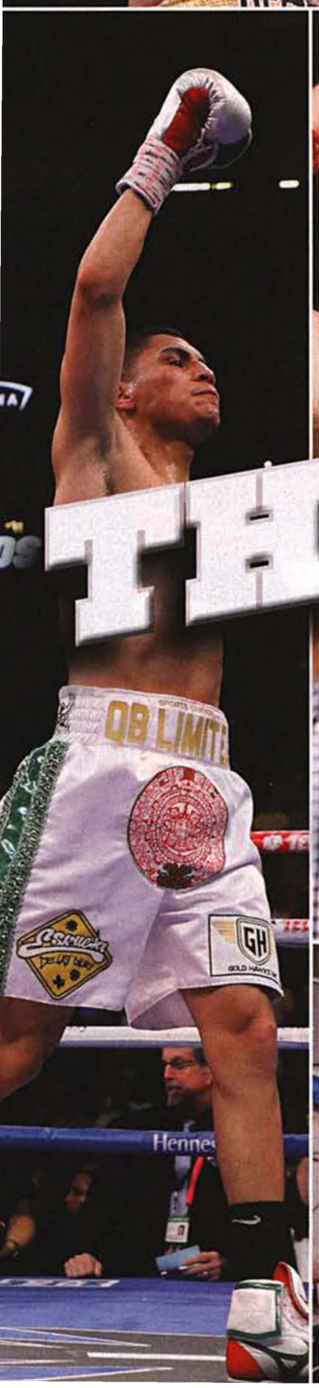
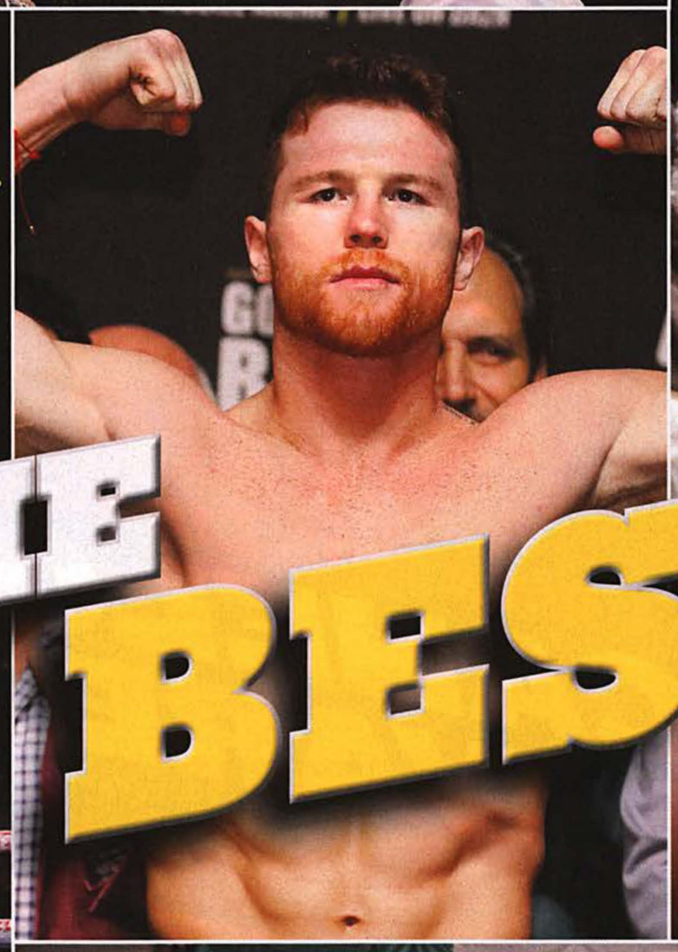


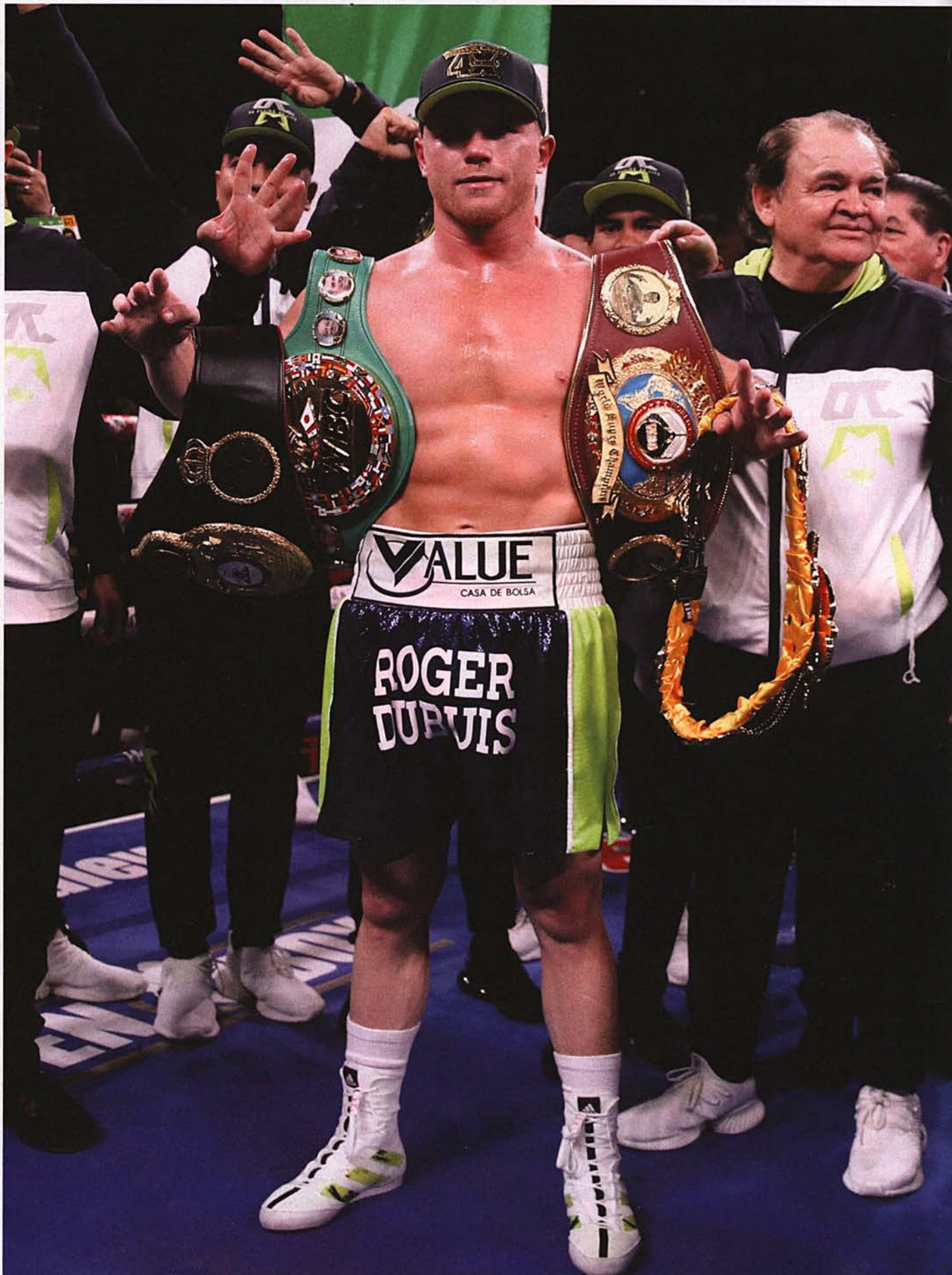


THE BEST OF 2019

THE 91ST ANNUAL RING AWARDS

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BY DOUG FISCHER



CANELO ALVAREZ

Canelo Alvarez was unbeaten in 10 bouts coming into 2019. During that five-year span following the lone loss of his professional career – a majority decision to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in September 2013 – the Mexican star won and regained the Ring middleweight title, earned one major 154-pound strap and three 160-pound belts and outpointed two future Hall of Famers: Miguel Cotto and Gennadiy Golovkin.

However, Alvarez was never considered a strong candidate for Fighter of the Year during that run due to disputed decisions (vs. Erislandy Lara and Golovkin), his reluctance to face GGG in 2016, his fence-sitting between junior middleweight and middleweight (insisting on fighting at the 155-pound "Caneloweight," as hardcore fans called it), and the controversy of the clenbuterol scandal in early 2018.

Given his lofty stature in the sport (and the entitled attitude that comes with it), Alvarez will always have a die-hard legion of detractors belittling his every accomplishment, but he achieved more than enough in 2019 to transcend the general fan and media disapproval of previous years. This was a year that featured several title-unification bouts won by elite standouts – Naoya Inoue, Errol Spence Jr., Artur Beterbiev, Josh Taylor and Jose Ramirez. Alvarez (53-1-2, 36 KOs), who unified middleweight titles with a clear decision over Daniel Jacobs in May, one-upped them all by annexing a major light heavyweight belt with a history-making 11th-round knockout of Sergey Kovalev in November.

Defending the Ring 160-pound title against the magazine's No. 2-rated contender and then stopping the No. 2-rated 175-pounder to become the first reigning middleweight champ to win a major light heavyweight title was more than enough to convince the Editorial Board and Ratings Panel that Alvarez was the 2019 Fighter of the Year.

Despite his many considerable achievements and being one of the richest pro athletes in the world, winning the award moved the normally stoic three-division titleholder.

"I feel so many things – humbled, honored, blessed, satisfied – for me and for my team," Alvarez told The Ring in December with a translation assist from Raul Torres. "These are the things that motivate me to challenge myself."

A portion of the boxing world hoped

Canelo didn't just beat Kovalev; the win was a candidate for Knockout of the Year.

(LEFT) VALERY SHARIFULIN/TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES; STEVE MARCUS

one of Alvarez's 2019 challenges would be a third bout with his archrival, Golovkin, but the 29-year-old Guadalajara native viewed both Jacobs and Kovalev as formidable opponents and was proud of how he performed against the veterans.

"They were both great challenges to me," he said. "Danny Jacobs' style, the way he's so big but also so fast and mobile, was very difficult for me. I thought (Jacobs) was going to be a tougher fight than it was, but going up in weight to fight Kovalev was an even bigger challenge.

"Putting on the weight to fight at 175 pounds, where I was probably too heavy to be at my best, and fighting the most experienced light heavyweight in boxing was difficult. It was a problem for me, especially against a great champion like Kovalev, with his jab and power."

However, it wasn't the Russian's jab or power that troubled Alvarez for 10 rounds on November 2. It was the light heavyweight's lateral movement. Jacobs also adopted a stick-and-move approach (with an emphasis on the "move") vs. Alvarez, who says he wasn't surprised that both bouts of 2019 lacked toe-to-toe action.

"When fighters see me outside of the ring, they see a different guy; they see somebody they can beat, somebody they can bully inside the ring. But once we're in the ring, everything changes. They see that I can really fight and I'm ready to hit them back just as hard as they want to hit me."

We saw this with two very big, very skilled champions – Jacobs and Kovalev – and we saw it in the rematch with Golovkin, one of the most feared fighters of the decade.

"When I stand my ground or walk to my opponents, they don't want to engage with me. They see that I can move and counterpunch, and I hit a lot harder than they thought. It takes away their confidence to fight aggressively. It's a combination of things – ring generalship, fast hands, counterpunching, body punching – that all comes together, and it totally changes their mind-set of how they want to fight."

TOM HOGAN

Third Golovkin fight or not, Canelo proved in 2019 that he wants to challenge himself.

That combination of attributes, as well as an impressive body of work since winning his first world title in 2011, is also changing the mind-set of the U.S. boxing media that once viewed him as more hype than ability.

The Boxing Writers Association of America included Alvarez among the candidates for its coveted Joe Louis Fighter of the Decade award, along with Mayweather, Manny Pacquiao, Wladimir Klitschko and Andre Ward. That's Hall of Fame company.

The Kovalev victory added Alvarez's name to *legendary* company. The last reigning middleweight champion to challenge for the light heavyweight title was Sugar Ray Robinson in 1952. The greatest of all boxers succumbed to Joey Maxim (and 104-degree heat), remaining on his stool after the 13th round. Alvarez also became only the fourth former junior middleweight champ to win a 175-pound title, behind Thomas Hearns, Sugar Ray Leonard and Mike McCallum.

"I'm honored to have accomplished things that not too many fighters have accomplished, and in some cases, things that nobody has done before," Alvarez said. "It means so much to me for my name to be included with their names – the great fighters. It's just an honor. I can't really put how I feel into words."

Alvarez noted that his trainer, Eddy Reynoso, is a boxing historian and obsessed with helping him create a lasting legacy.

"A lot of great things are coming next year; I'm planning only big things," Canelo said.

For now, Alvarez is satisfied with winning Fighter of the Year in the same year that Reynoso was honored as Trainer of the Year.

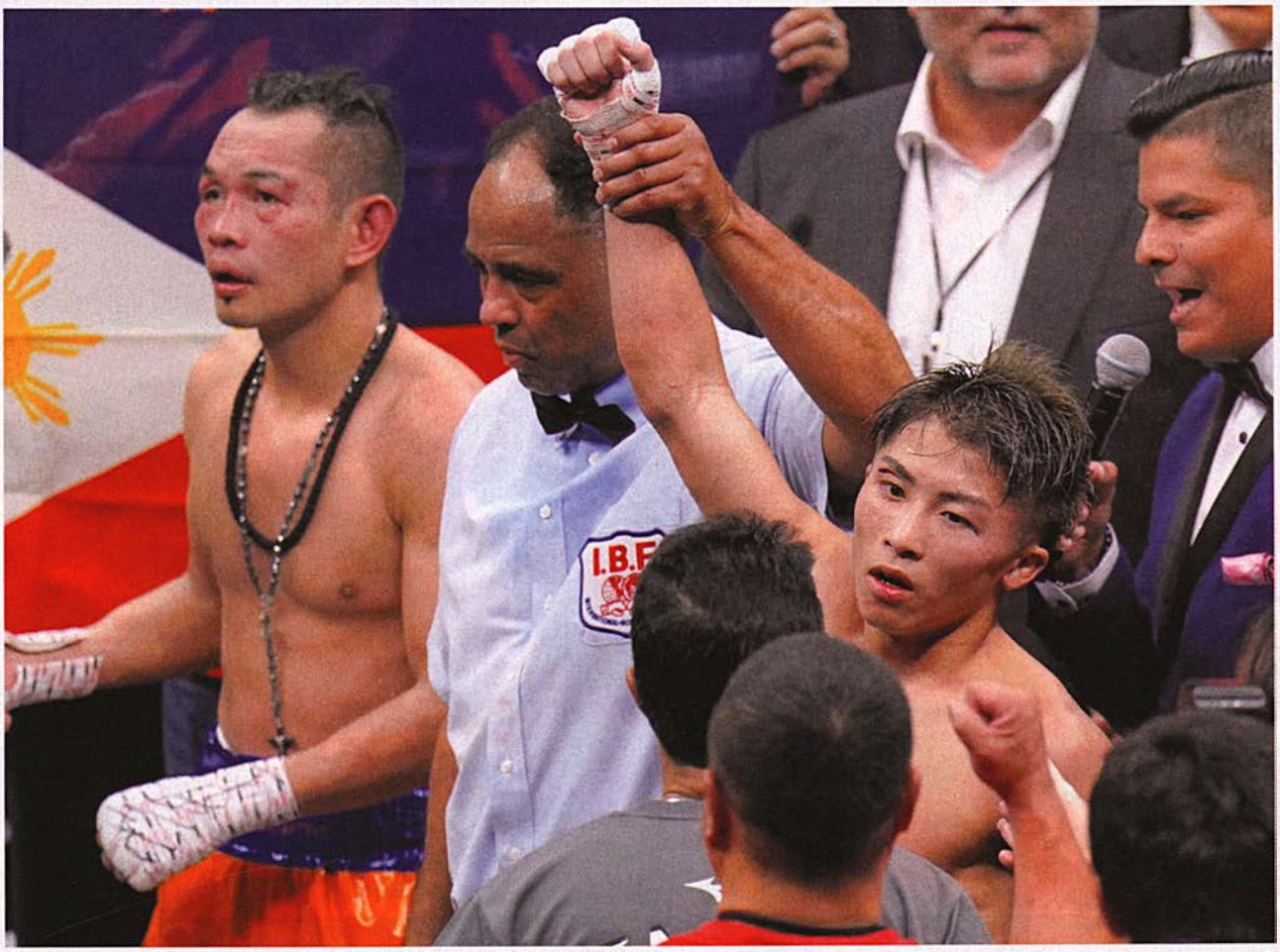
"I'm very happy for Eddy. He's been working so hard for so many years. I'm proud of him," he said. "I feel that we were deserving for a couple of years, but everything happens for a reason and in due time. I'm just glad that we've finally earned the respect of the media and the fans and we're seen as worthy of these honors." ★

OTHER NOMINEES:

- **Naoya Inoue:** The Japanese star earned the Ring bantamweight title with a ruthless second-round stoppage of unbeaten beltholder Emmanuel Rodriguez in the World Boxing Super Series semifinal and then won the 118-pound tournament in breathtaking fashion, outpointing Nonito Donaire in the Fight of the Year.
- **Josh Taylor:** The Scottish southpaw defeated unbeaten beltholder Ivan Baranchyk in the WBSS 140-pound semifinal, then won the tournament and the Ring junior welterweight title in an unforgettable showdown with American standout Regis Prograis, whom he defeated by majority decision.
- **Errol Spence Jr.:** The Ring's top-rated welterweight turned back the challenge of lightweight star Mikey Garcia (39-0 with 30 knockouts at the time) via shutout and then unified two 147-pound titles in a rousing and dramatic 12-round battle with rugged veteran Shawn Porter, winning by split decision.
- **Manny Pacquiao:** The Filipino icon proved he's still a top welterweight (and a pay-per-view attraction), even at the age of 40, by scoring decisions against Adrien Broner and Keith Thurman. The split nod against Thurman, one of the more entertaining fights of 2019, made the senator the fifth-oldest major world titleholder in history.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

BY TOM GRAY



NAOYA INOUE UD 12 NONITO DONAIRE

"He's takin' four-punch combinations and he's still comin' forward! Nobody does that!" The fight was less than six minutes old and a member of the media was stunned by what was unfolding before him. Without exaggeration, that writer spoke for every single one of us on press row at the Super Arena in Saitama, Japan, on November 7.

A world titleholder across three weight divisions, Naoya "The Monster" Inoue was accustomed to chewing up the opposition and spitting them out. Suddenly, the Japanese powerhouse was in against a great – albeit veteran – opponent who refused to be devoured. Four-weight world titleholder Nonito Donaire had traveled 5,500 miles from Las Vegas for all-out war.

It was the bantamweight final of the World Boxing Super Series tournament. Inoue, the heavy favorite, brought Ring Magazine and IBF titles to the table, while the soon-to-be 37-year-old Donaire – winner of nine recognized title belts in total – was defending the WBA version. The winner would also receive the Muhammad Ali trophy and be universally accepted as the No. 1 bantamweight on the planet.

Like all great fights, this one contained dramatic ebb and flow.

Donaire sent a statement of intent in Round 2 when he cut Inoue's right eye with a stiff left hook, which, as it turned out, broke the Japanese star's orbital bone and – if we can take him at his word – caused him to have double vision for the remainder of the fight.

Punished for being overly aggressive, Inoue wisely switched tactics. While the 26-year-old is best known for his thunderous hitting power and finishing

The exhaustion was clear on both fighters' faces after the back-and-forth war had ended.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR: NAOYA INOUE UD 12 NONITO DONAIRE

Neither fighter could finish the other with his vaunted left hand, a fact that surely contributed to the respect they shared afterward.

ability, he also has terrific ring craft. And now was the time to show it. In the early rounds, "The Monster" became "The Skillster," working his jab and releasing sharp combinations before moving off at angles to avoid return fire.

But Inoue is a knockout artist by nature. With every round that passed, he was gauging Donaire's habits and looking to pounce. That moment arrived in Round 5 when Inoue countered a jab that had fallen short with a deadly right hand. Donaire's legs dipped, and only his experience and warrior instincts kept him upright when Inoue went through the gears. The home fighter maintained his aggression in Round 6, but Donaire was still in the fight.

It was back to smart boxing, but the fight had reached a point where Donaire's championship experience was crucial. Inoue had only gone the 12-round distance once in his career (UD 12 David Carmona in May 2016), whereas Donaire had been there on nine occasions. "The Filipino Flash" knew this was a marathon and not a sprint, and now it was his turn to exploit mistakes. In Round 9, Inoue made the same error that his opponent had made earlier in the fight; he didn't get his jab hand back quick enough, and a pulverizing counter right shook him to his boots. For the first time in seven years as a professional, Inoue was badly hurt. Donaire pursued with savage intent and continued to pile on the pressure in the 10th.

Inoue was marginally ahead entering the 11th, but Donaire was on the ascent in terms of momentum. In order for there to be a switch, the Japanese phenom needed something new and fast. It was noticeable throughout the contest that Inoue was neglecting the body attack, a staple of his formidable offense. Therefore, the decision to follow a throwaway right uppercut with a brutal left hook to the liver was the best tactical maneuver of Inoue's career to date. Striking the engine of the older man this late in the fight was intentional. The pain kicked in and Donaire jogged a few steps before dropping to his knees. He was helped by referee Luigi Boscarelli, who inexplicably blocked Inoue from attempting to finish. From ringside and on TV, Donaire also looked like he was the beneficiary of a long count.

The stricken warrior managed to find his feet, and Inoue went all-out for the finish. Donaire protected his body, but he was reeling from headshots and the writing was on the wall. Suddenly, from nowhere, Donaire showed us why he's a first-ballot Hall of Famer. A handful of seconds away from being stopped, in terrible pain, under tremendous pressure, he timed an Inoue right hand and came over the top with his signature left hook. It was a killer blow and it landed flush. Inoue was dazed and wore a look of absolute shock and awe on his bloodied mask.

As they had all night, both men battled ferociously in the final round, and when it was all over, they embraced warmly. Friendly outside of the ring, they knew they'd made history together, and they knew this fight would never be forgotten. Scores were 117-109, 116-111 and 114-113 for Inoue.

"Donaire was a very, very strong opponent," said the winner afterward. "This is the first cut I have had in my career. I think Donaire is a true champion.

"Winning the Ali Trophy is the biggest thing so far in my career, and I see a bright future in front of me. I am not the greatest of all time yet, but that is the goal."

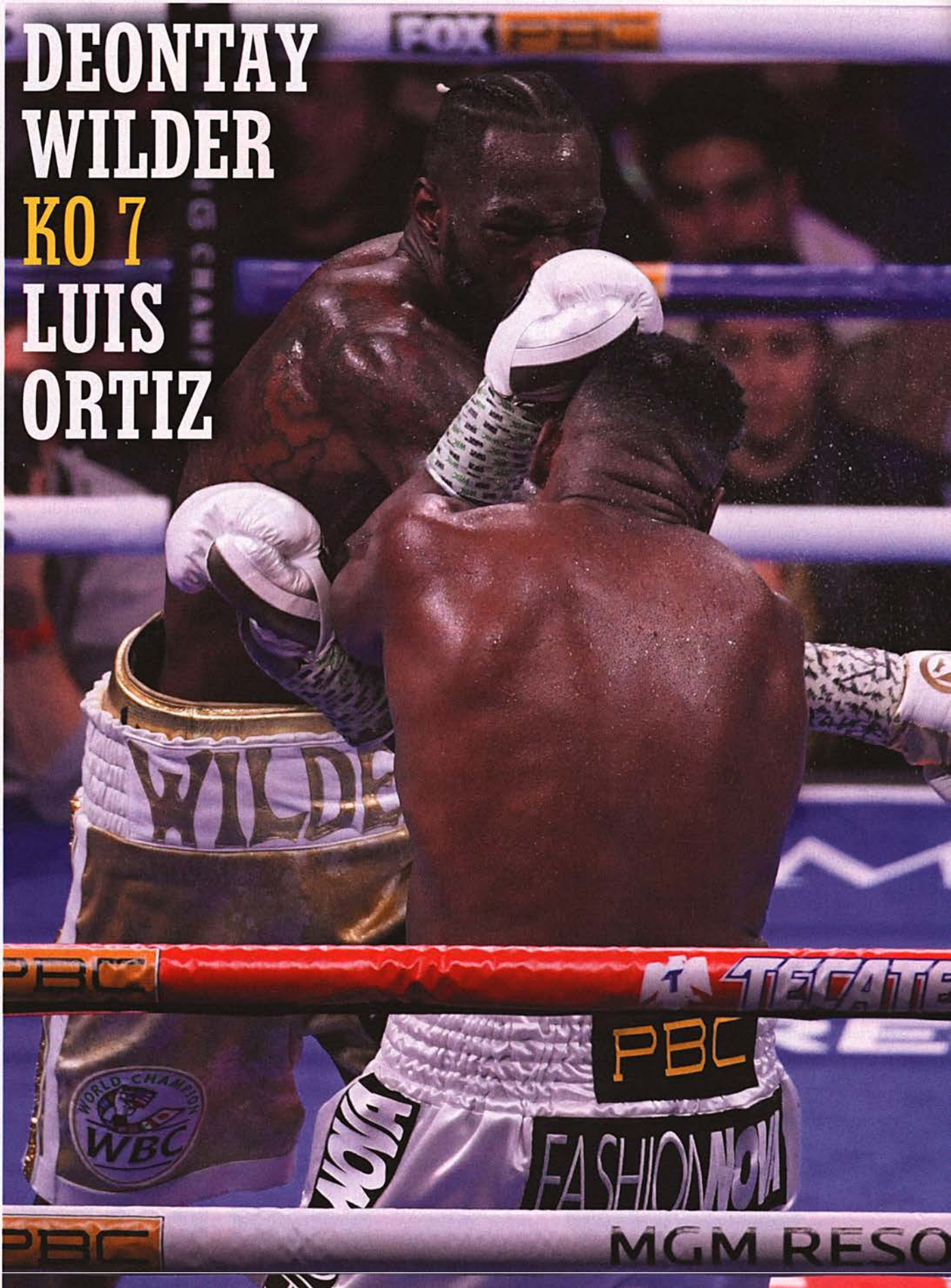
It was an honor to be ringside for what was the best fight I ever saw live. ★

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Josh Taylor MD 12 Regis Prograis
- Errol Spence Jr. SD 12 Shawn Porter
- Manny Pacquiao SD 12 Keith Thurman
- Gennadiy Golovkin UD 12 Sergiy Derevyanchenko

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

BY BRIAN HARTY



DEONTAY WILDER KO 7 LUIS ORTIZ

The 2019 Knockout of the Year eventually came down to two choices, but the fighter receiving the award was going to be the same either way. The question was whether Deontay Wilder's first-round smiting of Dominic Breazeale was more impressive than his screw-the-scorecards statement against Luis Ortiz.

After about two minutes, Wilder had already grown weary of sharing the ring with Breazeale, whose previous chance to win a title had ended with a beatdown from Anthony Joshua in 2016. At that point, having just been separated from a clinch by referee Harvey Dock at Barclays Center on May 18, the 6-foot-7 Tuscaloosan almost didn't bother with putting up his gloves before taking a hop-step forward and throwing a one-two (heavy, heavy emphasis on TWO) that god-stomped Breazeale into a man-shaped puddle. It was an absolute monster of a punch, and for the next six months it would be the frontrunner for the most memorable knockout of 2019.

The straight right that knocked out Ortiz on November 23 didn't have quite the atom-fusing force as the one that finished Breazeale, but the knockout was ultimately chosen as this year's winner for one very muscular reason: Ortiz. In a general comparison, the Cuban was more of a threat than Breazeale in almost every way besides height – better boxer, better résumé, faster, stronger – and beyond that, he'd already showed that he could hurt Wilder specifically. This was a rematch of their fight from March 2018, in which Wilder had hung on for dear life after getting rocked by several heavy punches in the seventh round and appeared to be just seconds from defeat at the bell, but he recovered and came back to win by 10th-round TKO. At the time of that stoppage, Ortiz was behind by only one point on all three official scorecards, and the deficit was due to a knockdown in the fifth. Some non-officials had him ahead.

Luis Ortiz might've had the superior boxing skills, but they didn't save him from the devastating force of Deontay Wilder's punch.

In the moments before he lost the rematch, Ortiz was comfortably ahead on all three judges' cards and had won every round in the eyes of some ringsiders. The big man with the perma-scowl even looked like he was enjoying how easy it was to outbox the incumbent WBC titleholder.

And then, with only six seconds left in the seventh round, after a few patient sticks to keep Ortiz at the right distance, Wilder tapped his opponent's gloves with a half-hearted left and the Cuban took the bait, overcompensating with his right to sweep the pseudo-jab away and leaving himself open to the thunderbolt that was already on the way. The right cross hit Ortiz's temple so hard that the cloud of sweat droplets launched from his head was probably still sailing toward the cheap seats when "King Kong" landed on the canvas. And he landed flat on his back, still conscious but face contorted by the effort of trying to rise and eyes impossibly wide with the shock of finding that not a single limb would respond.

And here again is what separated this knockout from the one in second place: It was the Wilder-est Wilder punch of them all, because it proved more than any other – even more so than the one that almost took out Tyson Fury in 2018's Round of the Year – that you can tick all the boxes that make you the better boxer on paper and you can be ahead on all the cards, but it just doesn't matter when you're up against this guy. It's what defines him. Go ahead and talk about how Wilder was "figuring out" and "testing" Ortiz for those six-plus rounds if you want. Maybe it's true. It just doesn't matter. Wilder's right hand is the surest and scariest thing in boxing. ★

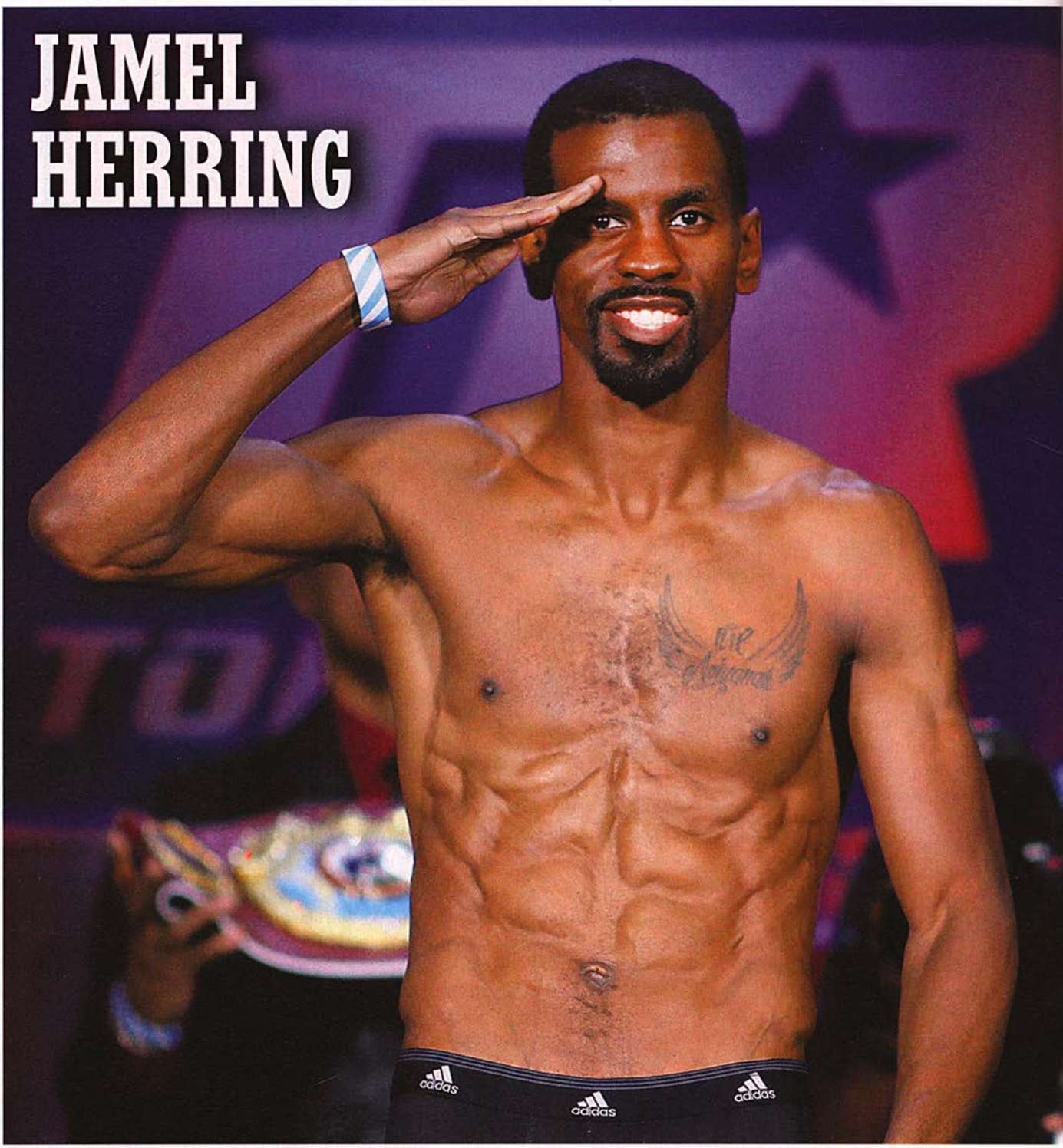
OTHER NOMINEES:

- Vergil Ortiz Jr. KO 3 Mauricio Herrera
- Deontay Wilder KO 1 Dominic Breazeale
- Dereck Chisora KO 2 Artur Szpilka
- Canelo Alvarez KO 11 Sergey Kovalev

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

BY DOUG FISCHER

JAMEL HERRING



Jamel Herring's comeback began less than 30 minutes after his last loss, a 10-round decision to a 13-1 prospect named Ladarius Miller in August 2017. It came to fruition on November 9, 2019, the night he defended the WBO 130-pound title against unbeaten mandatory challenger Lamont Roach Jr.

The ESPN-televised unanimous decision put Herring in line for significant showdowns in 2020 – including a defense against U.K. star Carl Frampton and a title-unification bout against The Ring's

Teetering on the edge of becoming a permanent B-side, Jamel Herring took control of his career.

No. 1-rated junior lightweight, Miguel Berchelt.

At age 34, with two losses on his record, the 2012 U.S. Olympian wasn't supposed to be in this position. And the affable southpaw was indeed doubted every step of the way from the Miller loss to the Roach defense, a total of five victories – including an upset title-winning decision over Masayuki Ito in May – during a span of a little over two years. But he enters 2020 as a major 130-pound player and the recipient of The Ring's 2019 Comeback of the Year award.

"I've always believed in the old saying, 'You're not a real champion until you successfully defend your title,'" Herring told The Ring. "With that in mind, I knew I had to motivate myself more for Roach than I did against Ito, which leads us to where we're at now. I've ended 2019 as a champion. I go into 2020 with my name mentioned in big fights. I feel like I'm finally getting the proper respect I always craved."

Herring, who won his first 15 pro bouts before suffering a punishing 10th-round stoppage to Denis Shafikov in 2016, is a long way from where he was at the end of 2017. Climbing the rankings seemed unlikely after losing to the Russian lightweight contender; winning a world title was almost inconceivable following his loss to Miller, his second setback in three bouts.

However, Herring believed that fundamental changes – along with a little time and a lot of hard work – could get him back on track, and the former Marine had the character to make those hard choices.

"I knew immediately after the Miller fight, in the locker room, that I needed a change," he said. "I remember sitting around my silent team and it felt like a funeral. I remember telling myself that I just had a daughter who was born prematurely, with medical problems, and I had to do something to provide for her."

Herring, who was part of the vast Premier Boxing Champions stable at the time, made the decision to part ways with trainer Mike Stafford and consider working with other promotional companies.

"I knew my contract with Al Haymon was coming to an end and thought it was best to go in a new direction, but I didn't exactly know where I'd end up," he said. "I didn't know if any of these big promoters would even touch me since I was coming off a loss."

He was a hard sell. A few promoters were willing to use him in one-offs – as a stepping-stone opponent, of course. Finding a new trainer proved to be easier.

"I spoke with (promoter and boxing personality) Michelle Rosado, the 'Raging Babe,' and she said, 'Why don't you give Bomac a call?' She referenced Brian McIntyre because I had recently been in camp with Terence Crawford, sparring with him for the Julius Indongo fight.

"McIntyre immediately welcomed me with open arms. A lot of people don't know this, but once I teamed up with Bomac, we were willing to continue working with the PBC. The only issue we had was the weight class. They kept offering fighters at lightweight, but I kept urging that I wanted to make a new run at 130 pounds. We couldn't agree with the weight, so we parted ways. I reached out to Main Events, Golden Boy and Top Rank. All were hesitant, but thanks to my adviser, Jerry Casarez, and Bomac hammering from both sides, Top Rank caved in and offered me a full contract."

Despite the multi-fight deal, the prevailing thought among fans and media was that Top Rank was building Herring up to serve as a marketable B-side for one of the junior lightweight beltholders they work with, or for one of the featherweight titleholders they promote.

"We went into 2018 taking one fight at a time," Herring said. "We had a contract with Top Rank, but I wasn't foolish enough to believe my career was set on a silver platter. I had to make a statement with each bout to make Top Rank see some upside to promoting me. I ended 2018 with three good wins and I aimed for a world title in 2019."

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Rene Alvarado
- Anthony Joshua
- Sergey Kovalev
- Julian Williams

But while oddsmakers liked his chances in his first title bout, the boxing world still had doubts about Herring versus Ito, a dynamic volume-puncher from Tokyo who Top Rank signed one month prior to their fight.

"The crazy thing about boxing is that most only remember your losses," Herring said. "So, I entered this year with a chip on my shoulder. Fans gave me little chance to win the fight against Ito, and most of the media were already talking about a unification bout between Berchelt and Ito.

"But there was no doubt in my mind that I could beat him, and it showed. I easily outboxed him.

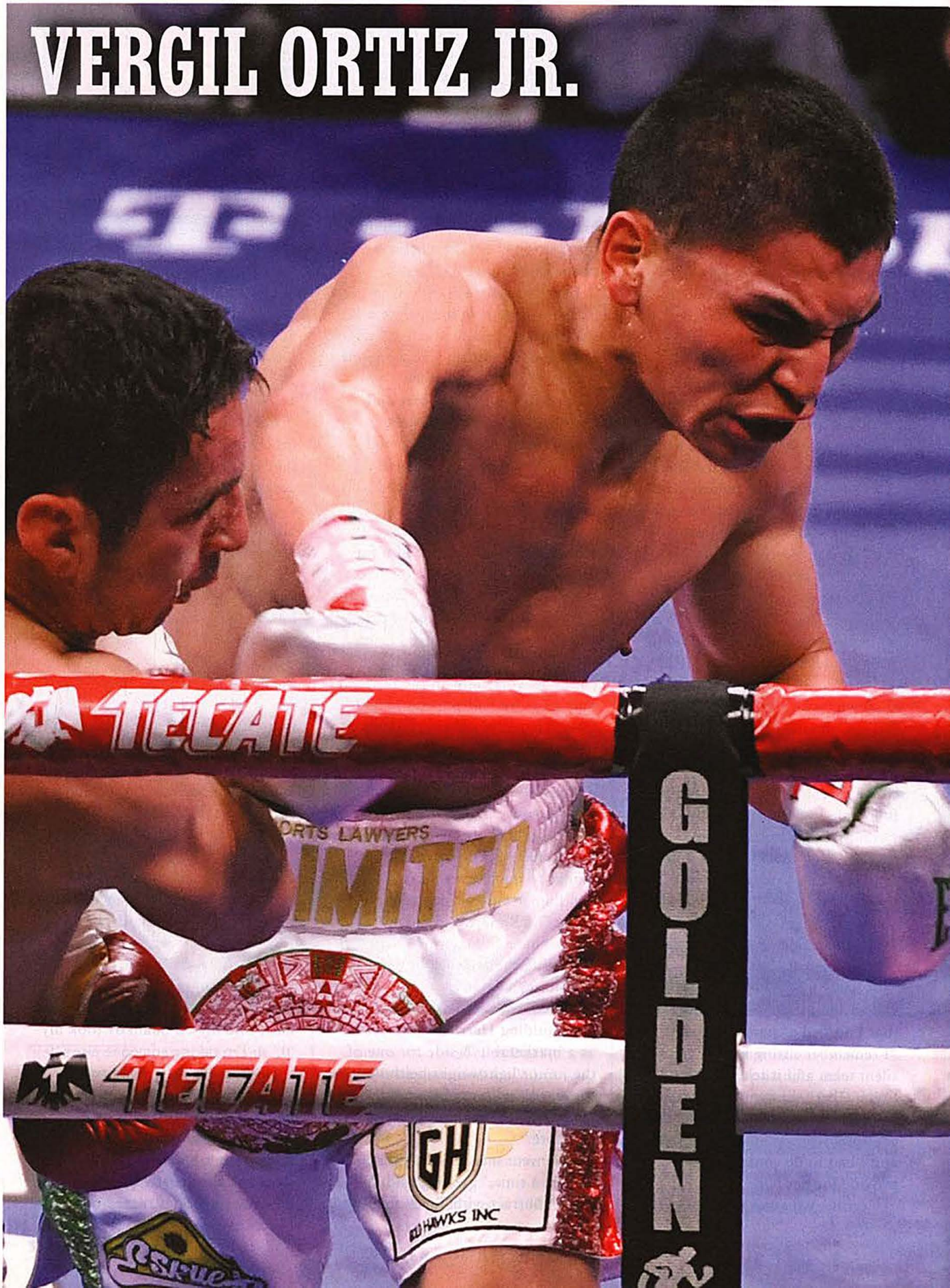
"Then the mandatory challenger popped up: Roach. I was surprised by the media's portrayal of this matchup. They figured since Roach was undefeated and younger that I would struggle with him, but I thought Ito was slightly better than Roach in some areas. His undefeated record was actually what motivated me. I told myself Shafikov took my '0,' so I'm taking someone else's '0.'"

Herring won't be doubted in 2020, whether his rivals have an "0" to take or not.

"I'm truly grateful that I've had to earn my respect," he said. "I wouldn't change anything about how my career has turned out." ★

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

VERGIL ORTIZ JR.



Vergil Ortiz Jr. is an aggressive, heavy-handed puncher who is physically strong, possesses underrated boxing skills and has a fan-friendly style – all reasons for why he started 2019 as a blue-chip prospect. He validated that status with four impressive stoppage wins against sturdy opposition.

Ortiz was born in Grand Prairie, Texas, and began boxing at just 5 years old. He won seven national titles as an amateur, including the 2013 Junior Olympics and three consecutive Silver Gloves, while compiling a 140-20 record. Ortiz had aspirations of participating in the Olympic Games in Rio, but at 16 was too young to compete in the Trials. He didn't want to wait through another four-year cycle, so he elected to sign with Golden Boy Promotions in 2016.

In January 2019, the 21-year-old bludgeoned Jesus A. Valdez Barrayan into submission after five rounds on the undercard of 2017 Prospect of the Year Jaime Munguia's fight against Takeshi Inoue. Ortiz was struggling to make 140 pounds, however, so he stepped up to welterweight and returned in May to knock out grizzled veteran Mauricio Herrera in three rounds on the undercard of Canelo Alvarez-Daniel Jacobs.

In August, Ortiz thrilled his hometown fans when he took apart former junior welterweight title challenger Antonio Orozco, dropping him three times en route to a sixth-round knockout. He closed the year with a KO of Brad Solomon to up his record to a perfect 15-0 (15 knockouts).

"(Solomon) was difficult to figure out," Ortiz said after the victory. "He made me think. I tried not to rush things. I had to utilize my jab. I just had to use my smarts. I knew he was going to be a tough cookie to break. I felt like I did a good job."

DAZN color commentator Sergio Mora has been suitably impressed by the way Ortiz has gone about his business over the past year.

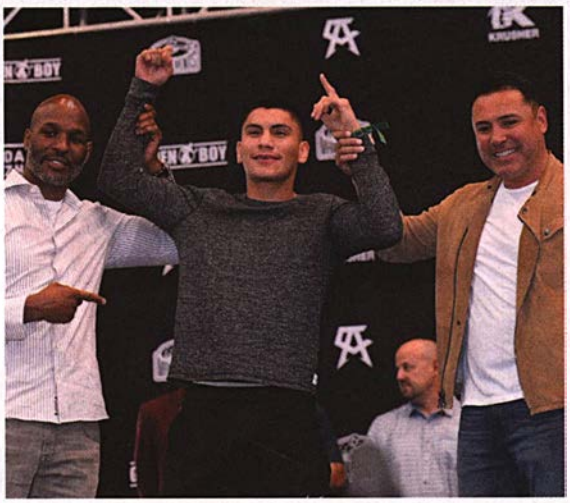
"I've seen him develop just like anyone else; the only difference is I get to see it up close and personal," said Mora. "He's a special young man. All business inside and outside the ring. He's aggressive and methodical, applies incredible pressure without being reckless. (His) technique is always on point.

"(In) his last three fights, he's stopped three opponents in Herrera, Orozco and Solomon, and (was the) first to stop all three. His confidence in his ability is only getting stronger, which is why he has the gall to call out champions like Keith Thurman and Danny Garcia. He's a beast."

Ortiz's promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, believes the sky is the limit for his fighter.

"Vergil is destined to be a world champion," said De La Hoya. "Vergil has the natural talent and skill that you don't find every day in boxing prospects. His talent speaks for itself inside the ring, with none of his fights going to the final bell. We stepped up his competition and he KO'd every one of them. Next year we have to step it up to some top-10 guys; and believe me, he is ready for any of those guys. Vergil is the most disciplined fighter we have and is on his way to greatness."

For now, Ortiz is The Ring's Prospect of the Year. ★



AL BELLO

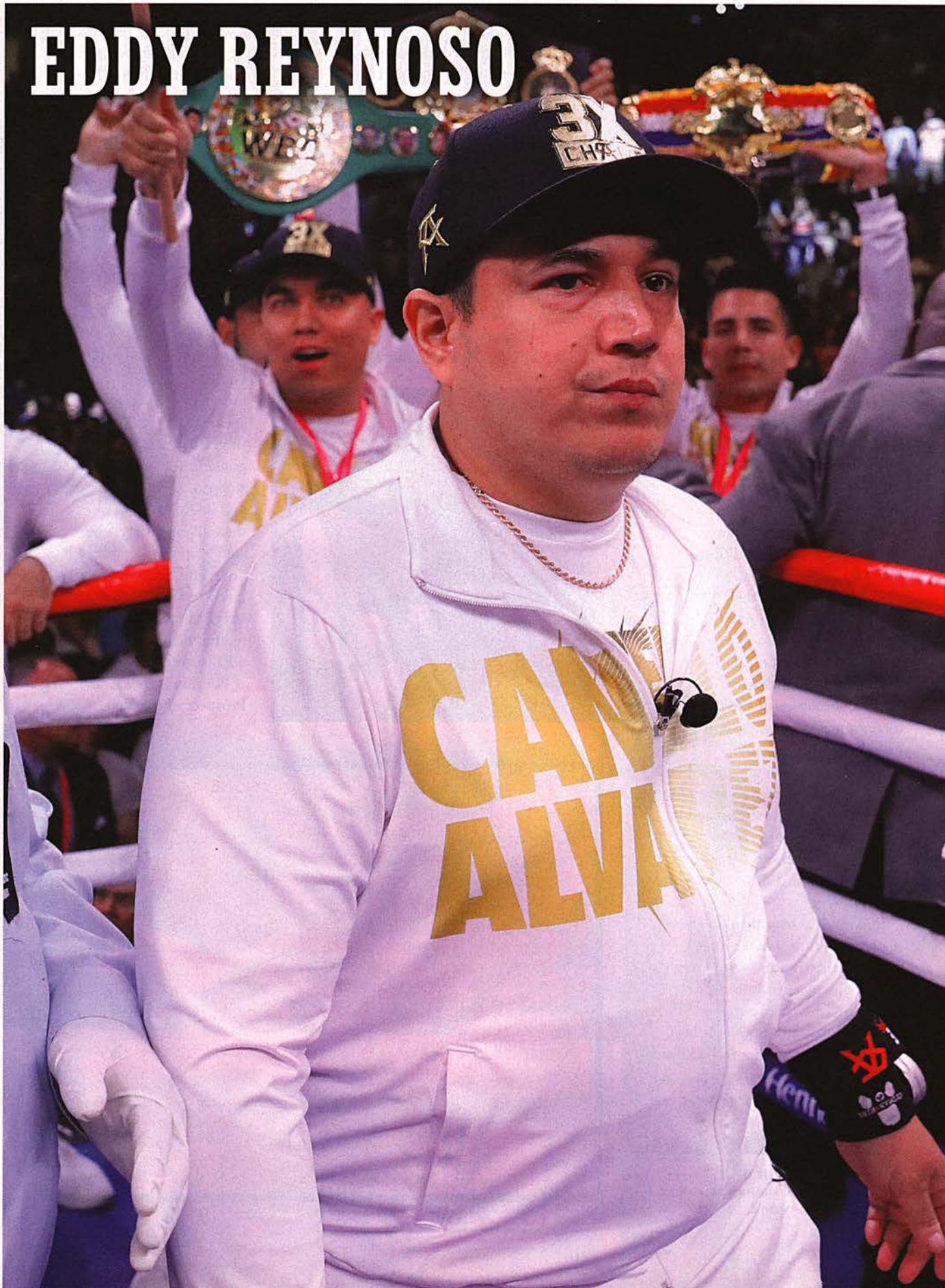
None of Vergil Ortiz's 15 opponents have managed to get past the sixth round.

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Sadriddin Akhmedov - The 21-year-old Kazakhstani junior middleweight was a standout amateur and has looked impressive in winning all 11 fights, 10 inside the distance, since moving to Canada to start his professional career.
- Jaron Ennis - The young welterweight looks like the next great Philadelphia fighter. "Boots" won both his fights in 2019 to take his record to 24-0 (22 KOs). The 22-year-old will fight on January 10 in Atlantic City on Showtime.
- Israil Madrimov - "The Dream" has been a nightmare for all four of his professional opponents to date. The 24-year-old Uzbekistan-born junior middleweight is fine-tuning his skills under the stewardship of Joel Diaz in California.
- Daniel Dubois - The 22-year-old London-born heavyweight (14-0, 13 KOs) has lived up to his billing of "Dynamite" against steadily improving opposition. He stopped all five of his 2019 opponents (with a combined fight-night record of 86-7-0) inside five rounds.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY MICHAEL MONTERO



Mexico's Saul "Canelo" Alvarez has been the largest financial draw in boxing following the Floyd Mayweather Jr. era, but he has also blossomed into one of the finest technicians in the sport under Eddy Reynoso's instruction. The trainer's growing reputation has attracted recent newcomers Ryan Garcia, Oscar Valdez and newly crowned WBC flyweight titleholder Julio Cesar Martinez, who have also developed under his guidance.

In 2019, Alvarez further unified the middleweight championship against titleholder Daniel Jacobs, then moved up two divisions to face 175-pound titleholder Sergey Kovalev. Many observers had Kovalev ahead going into the championship rounds of their November 2 fight, but it didn't matter. With the Russian backed up on the ropes late in the 11th round, Canelo scored a highlight-reel knockout to claim the WBO belt.

Although numerous big-fight options spanning three divisions lie ahead for Alvarez, Reynoso says they will likely focus on middleweight and super middleweight in 2020. "There are interesting options in the 160- and 168-pound divisions," he said. "There are guys like (Gennadiy) Golovkin, BJ Saunders, Callum Smith, Demetrius Andrade and (Jermall) Charlo. All of them are important fighters for Canelo. Those are the names that are interesting, and out of them, we will fight two next year." Some have questioned Canelo's ability and willingness to melt back down to the 160-pound middleweight division limit after moving all the way up to 175 for Kovalev, but Reynoso says it's not an issue. "We're comfortable making 160 pounds. With good preparation, we won't have any problems."

Undefeated American lightweight prospect Ryan "Kingry" Garcia began working with Reynoso after a shaky majority decision win over Carlos Morales in September 2018. Since making the change, Garcia has scored three straight stoppage wins. "It's been a year since I started working with Ryan, and he's improved a lot," Reynoso told The Ring. "Morales was a tough fight; you can even say he almost lost. But since Ryan started working with me, we've made great changes. The boxing that I try to teach, he's adapted to very well. The results are there to see."

After a messy contract dispute with Golden Boy Promotions during the summer, Garcia fought Filipino-American Romero Duno in the co-main of the Kovalev-Canelo card. It was the first bout of his new contract with Golden Boy and "Kingry" did not disappoint, scoring an emphatic first-round knockout that left fans buzzing inside the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. Although many are eager to see Garcia challenge for a world title soon, Reynoso says he needs a little more time. "He's a young fighter; he still needs to mature," he said. "I believe that in another year Ryan will be ready to fight and beat anybody." The 21-year-old from California will likely co-headline a card with former lightweight titleholder Jorge Linares in early 2020, setting up a collision course for the winners later in the year.

Mexican native Valdez, who now lives in the Los Angeles area, joined the Reynoso camp after breaking his jaw in a rough unanimous decision win over former junior featherweight titleholder Scott Quigg in March 2018. The trainer says his first mission was to diversify Oscar's purely offensive, aggressive style. "Oscar loves to come forward," Reynoso said. "Before, he would hit his opponent with a punch and then open up his guard and exchange crazily. Little by little, we're calming his temperament and sharpening his skills." Valdez went 3-0 (2 KOs) in 2019, including a move to 130 pounds after dumping his featherweight world title, which he had defended six times.

Although he was dominant in victories over previously undefeated Carmine Tommasone and Jason Sanchez, Valdez struggled with last-minute substitute Adam Lopez on November 30. Lopez, also from the L.A. area, replaced original opponent Andres Gutierrez, who weighed in 11 pounds over the junior lightweight limit. Things got off to a rocky start; Oscar found himself on the canvas after eating a counter left hook in the second round. However, Reynoso coached his fighter back into the bout, and Valdez went on to eventually drop and stop Lopez in Round 7. Since it was an eliminator bout, a challenge against WBC titleholder Miguel Berchelt will likely be next. Although many favor the current titlist to defeat Valdez, Reynoso is confident in his fighter. "What's important is to have a long camp for Berchelt, about four months," he told The Ring. "It's going to be two months of just going to school and learning, working on strategy, and then the following two months working on his physical strength. I think that with the right strategy we can do very well against Berchelt, because I believe in Oscar's abilities."

After being a top contender for the award in recent years, Reynoso is now The Ring's Trainer of the Year. "This award is a dream come true," he said. "When I started off as a trainer, I always wanted to be recognized as one of the best to come from Mexico. This recognition fills me with a lot of pride." ★

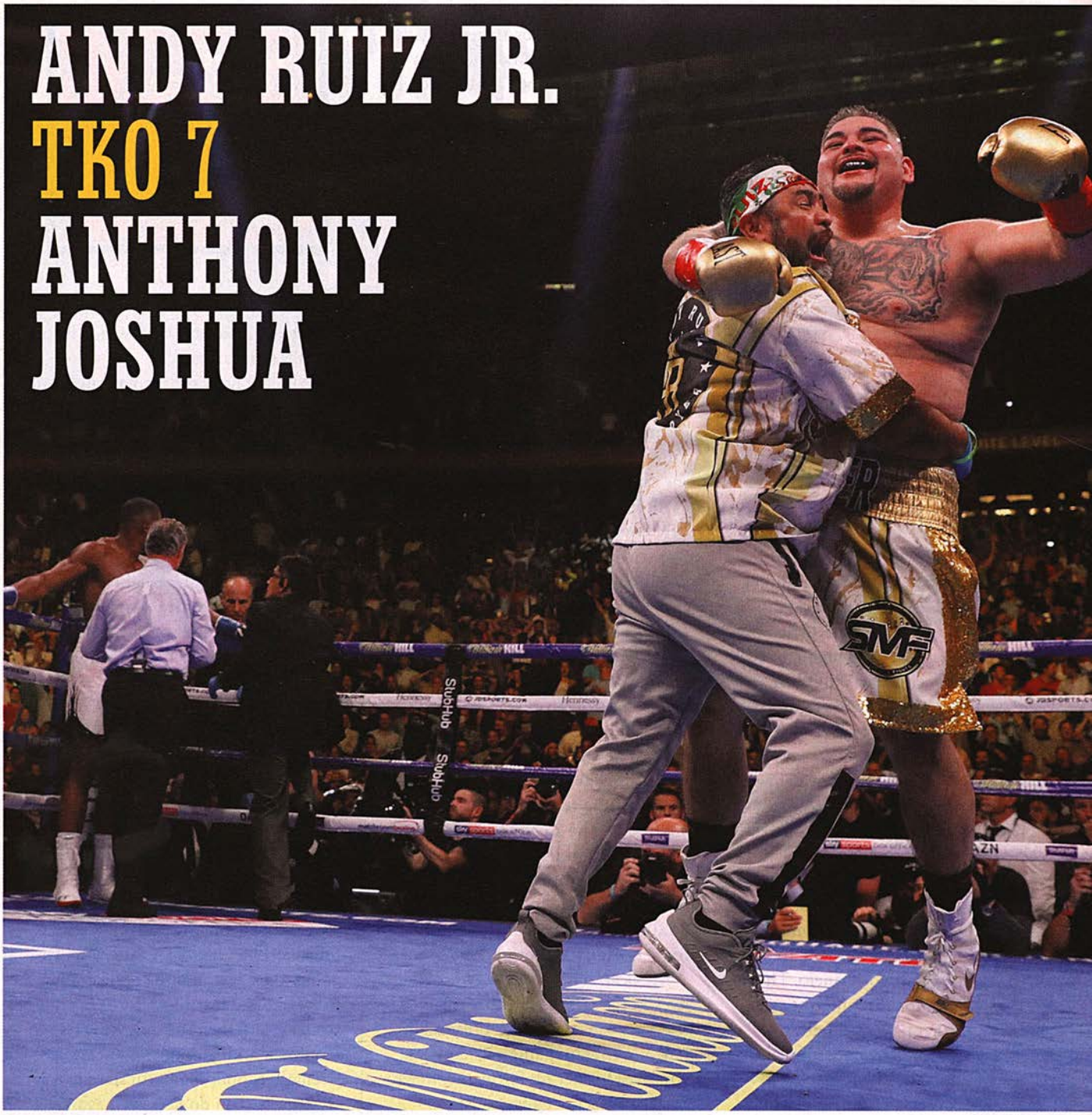
Eddy Reynoso is the quiet architect behind Canelo Alvarez's rise.

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Stephen Edwards
- Rob McCracken
- Shane McGuigan
- Brian McIntyre

BY RON BORGES

ANDY RUIZ JR. TKO 7 ANTHONY JOSHUA



Several days before his improbable challenge for the heavyweight title, a chubby kid from a Southern California farm town warned unified champion Anthony Joshua that a boxer, like a book, should not be judged by its cover.

"Don't underestimate this little fat boy," Andy Ruiz told Joshua. Joshua should have listened but, like the Goliath he resembles, he laughed instead. That would prove to be a mistake.

Standing barely six feet while weighing a portly 268 pounds, Ruiz's cautionary words seemed ludicrous at the time. Although Ruiz had a 32-1 record with his only loss a disputed majority decision to Joseph Parker when they fought for the then-vacant WBO title, he was widely dismissed

Andy Ruiz Jr. was floating on air after his shocking stoppage of Anthony Joshua for a trio of heavyweight titles.

as a joke. Or, if not a joke, a rather large sacrificial lamb.

Ruiz was an 11-1 underdog at the Caesars Palace Sportsbook when the first bell tolled at Madison Square Garden on the night of June 1, and with good reason. Although he had fast hands and surprisingly quick feet, not only did Ruiz more resemble a good-natured bouncer than a boxer, he'd taken the Joshua fight with barely six weeks' notice after the original challenger, Jarrell "Big Baby" Miller, tested positive for three different kinds of performance-enhancing drugs.

Upon learning that, Ruiz contacted Joshua's promoter, Matchroom's Eddie Hearn, in search of a chance, promising he would give a good account of himself. It turns out he wasn't kidding.

So little was expected of Ruiz that when ring announcer Michael Buffer said "should this fight go the distance" before announcing the names of the judges before the fight, you could hear fans in the crowd laughing. To a degree they were right. They wouldn't need judges to decide the winner, but the winner was not who the world had decided it would be.

Dropped in the third round by a right uppercut and left hand behind it from the defending titleholder, Ruiz tumbled onto his ample backside for the first time in his career as the world awaited the predictable finish. Instead, Ruiz dusted himself off, jumped up, and a minute later landed a stunning left hand to Joshua's temple as the champion came forward recklessly. It turned Joshua's legs into noodles and the boxing world upside down.

As Joshua wobbled, Ruiz rifled off a wild flurry that sent Joshua to the floor. Up at seven, Joshua was clearly in trouble as the round's final seconds ticked down. Before Joshua could be saved by the bell, Ruiz assaulted him with an unanswered 10-punch flurry that dropped Joshua a second time as the crowd sat stunned.

Up at the count of seven, Joshua avoided further punishment only because the bell rang before Ruiz could again ring his bell. His mind swimming, Joshua wandered aimlessly toward his corner in a fog. It didn't lift for the rest of the night.

"That was my first time getting dropped on the floor," Ruiz would say later about having found himself on the canvas first. "It just made me stronger. It just made me want it more. I just had to knock him down back. (I took his power) because of the Mexican warrior I am. I have that Mexican blood in me."

Ruiz hurt Joshua again in Round 6, but it was another flurry that began with a stinging left hand and an overhand right early in Round 7 that sent Joshua reeling to the canvas for the third time. He got up at the count of seven but now seemed utterly bewitched and bewildered. Moving on legs that were protesting his commands and refusing to obey them, Joshua soon was floorward bound again after Ruiz rained down on him a torrent of punches and, to be honest, a forearm behind the neck that helped send Joshua to the canvas for the fourth time.

For a moment, Joshua, breathing heavily, squatted on one knee, his head hanging down. He seemed like a man faced with a difficult decision to make. Finally, he spat out his mouthpiece, an action nearly universally seen as a resignation, but referee Michael Griffin chose to give the champion every opportunity to continue.

Joshua arose at the count of seven but turned his back and walked away from Griffin before going to a neutral corner and spreading his arms wide across the top rope, a bemused look on his face. He appeared to be a condemned man in repose, waiting for the hangman to arrive.

Blood trickled from Joshua's nose as he looked at Griffin, who asked if he wanted to go on. Joshua declined to take the customary step toward the referee to signal his consent to continue fighting.

A moment later, Griffin waved his hands and just like that, at 1:26 of Round 7, the "little fat boy" from California was the new IBF, WBA and WBO heavyweight titleholder. It may not have been the biggest upset in heavyweight history – Buster Douglas' 42-1 longshot KO of Mike Tyson still holding that designation – but it was certainly the biggest upset in boxing in 2019.

"He didn't want to continue," chirped Manny Robles, Ruiz's trainer. "We had a great game plan – to stay low, not fight tall and work behind the jab. Hit the chest, the body. I told him to either fight inside or stay outside. I did not want him to fight at midrange and put himself in front of the big punches."

Ruiz jumped up and down, shaking the ring every time he landed, as Joshua looked across the ring at him, an odd smirk painted on his face. Later, Joshua (then 22-1, 21 KOs) would say, "Big respect to Andy. Big big respect. Good fighter … Sorry I let my friends down. Sorry I let my supporters down.

"There's no excuses. It's my own fault. I got caught with a big shot. Congratulations to him. I would have preferred it to be Deontay Wilder, do you know what I mean? But it wasn't. It was Andy Ruiz, and he deserves it and the fame and fortune he's about to receive.

"I don't want anyone to kind of drown in their sorrows. This is boxing. It just wasn't my night. It was Andy Ruiz's night." ★

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Julian Williams UD 12 Jarrett Hurd
- Andrew Cancio KO 4 Alberto Machado
- Adan Gonzalez SD 4 Robeisy Ramirez
- Jean Pascal TD 8 Marcus Browne

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

BY JOSEPH SANTOLIQUITO

JOSE RAMIREZ

The twice-yearly trips to Mexico always came with a high level of anticipation, like little Christmas Eves to Jose Ramirez, who was around 12 at the time. He looked at the world through the prism of a child's eyes. He knew enough that something was wrong with his maternal grandfather, Luis Gonzalez, though. Jose had noticed that "Papa Gonzalez" was deflating, that he didn't seem to have the energy he once had.

Ramirez had just embarked on what would become a lucrative boxing career. Papa Gonzalez got a chance to see that.

So did Jose's paternal grandfather, Jesus. It was Jesus who always told his grandson that he would one day be a world champion. Jesus got a chance to see that, too.

Jose Ramirez has the solace of knowing his grandfathers were there for part of his success before cancer took them both.

"It's powerful motivation," said Jose, the WBC/WBO junior welterweight titleholder. "Cancer is very close to me because of those experiences, and it's why I visit these kids in the hospital who are fighting cancer. I wouldn't want them to go through what I went through as a little kid who lost his grandfather to cancer, then a grown man whose grandfather couldn't be there for long after I won the title."

It's why Ramirez and his manager, Rick Mirigian, and the "KO Cancer" event they held in February, which raised a hefty five-figure sum, is The Ring's Most Inspirational story for 2019. That night, Ramirez successfully made his second title defense with a majority decision over Jose Zepeda at the sold-out Save Mart Arena in Fresno, California, with thousands of dollars coming from Ramirez's and Mirigian's own pockets toward "KO Cancer."

Ramirez (25-0, 17 knockouts) and Mirigian, who have both been affected by cancer, had teamed up to help children battling the disease at the Valley Children's Hospital in Madera, California. Ramirez admits that it hurts like a gut punch to see a little girl with no hair lying in bed with her parents by her side holding her hand, the father's eyes at half-mast due to a lack of sleep and the frazzled mother sitting there without makeup.

"That's the hardest part, seeing these young kids, kids my son's age and their families going through this," said Ramirez, who has a 4-year-old son. "Kids I would visit that are 4, 5, 6 that have cancer, it forces me to take a step back, and I have to ask myself, 'Why are these kids going through this?' You need to show strength. I can't get emotional, which is something that's not easy when you're sitting there with a family and their child is bald from the chemo treatments.

"You have to be brave and wear a brave face for them. If I can help someone or a family take their minds off that hell for a few minutes, that's what makes it worth it.

"I just want to bring smiles to their faces. I want to let them know that I'm inspired by them and their fight, and how courageous they are. I can't be selfish. I've had success and it's unfair what these children are going through. Before I became a world champion, I visited this kid (Ismael) in early 2017 – there were some kids who knew me and watched me on TV, (and) one of them became such a big fan that he always sent me pictures."

A month later, Ramirez went back to visit 8-year-old Ismael and was told the boy had passed away.

Each time it happens, a little piece of them travels with Ramirez. It's like he's carrying their souls each time he fights, he says.

After Ramirez beat Amir Imam for the vacant WBC belt in March 2018, his home of Avenal, California – a two-light town of 12,440 – threw their hero a parade.

At the end of the parade route stood a group holding aloft a blown-up picture of a boy with Ramirez. It was Ismael's family.

"This family traveled from Madero just to tell me about their son, and I found out I became a hero to this young kid. And that stays in me," Ramirez said. "Life builds you a certain way, and I do what I do with my heart and with respect. There was a lot that went into this drive, and I have a lot of people who have helped me, like my manager, Rick, Top Rank and ESPN."

Then the tough fighter who has barreled his way up the ranks of the 140-pound class hesitated for a moment.

"You live (these moments with) them all, and they build me up to do what I do," said Jose, a touch of emotion in his voice. "I live through these kids and their families, and everyone in the cancer community that I come across. I fight for more than myself. I fight for them." ★

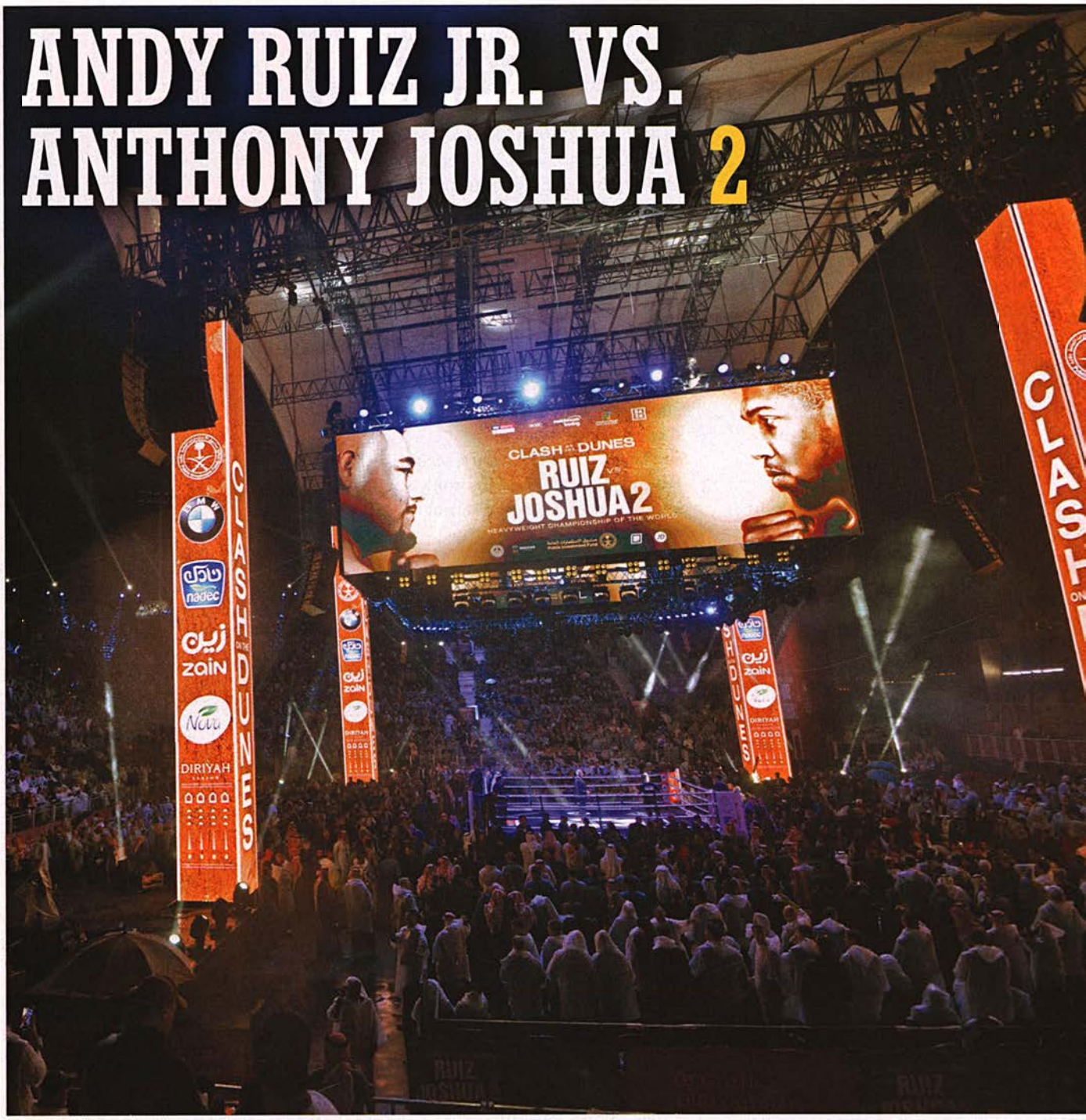
Jose Ramirez has used his success in the ring to raise money for cancer-stricken kids and their families.

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Adonis Stevenson's ongoing recovery and appearance at the WBC convention
- Claressa Shields and her incredible backstory in becoming The Ring's first female division champ
- Blair Cobbs' amazing life turnaround
- WBC chief Mauricio Sulaiman's dedication to fighter safety through the WBC

BY TRIS DIXON

ANDY RUIZ JR. VS. ANTHONY JOSHUA 2



When Saudi Arabia was initially mentioned as the destination for the rematch between deposed heavyweight king Anthony Joshua and his fast-handed conqueror, Andy Ruiz Jr., there was discontent. There was serious fan outrage and media opposition to the locale of this anticipated return bout, and rightfully so, given the country's well documented, brutal disregard for basic human rights, its oppression of women and its long history of violently repressing freedoms of press and communication, including the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018.

But whether you liked the given title, "Clash on the Dunes," you knew the fight was heading east

An outdoor arena (complete with rain tarp) was constructed specifically to host Ruiz-Joshua 2.

strictly because of the amount of Cash on the Dunes. This was not an event for the fans. It was simple math – influential moneymen in Saudi Arabia put more on the table than London, New York, Cardiff, Dubai and Las Vegas either would or more likely could match.

There was talk of a $70 million site fee.

"The arena and site are utterly breathtaking, with a theme park and concert the night before as well," said promoter Eddie Hearn. "It's like nothing we've seen before in boxing."

It was futile to point the finger directly at Joshua or Ruiz, or even at Matchroom.

Boxing had already been welcomed to these parts, with Amir Khan's July demolition of Billy Dib and the September 2018 World Boxing Super Series super middleweight final between Callum Smith and George Groves setting precedents.

The ambitious proposal included a temporary 15,000-seat stadium – the Diriyah Arena – in the middle of the desert that, days later, would see the 295 tons of steel on a 2½-acre site give way to a tennis tournament, the first Diriyah Cup, before it was returned to sand.

It took less than two months for a team of 175 working around the clock to put it together.

But it wasn't just an event because of the location.

Fans, pundits and purists were split on who would win the second time around. Had it been a punch from the gods, as Joshua claimed, that triggered his demise in New York? Did Ruiz have his number? Was the weight of expectation too great for the Englishman to carry? Did he still have ambition and hunger, or had he become a manufactured brand without a fighting heart? There was plenty at play even before Saudi Arabia was unveiled as the destination.

Their first contest, at Madison Square Garden in June, saw the unheralded and rotund challenger slip in at short notice after original foe Jarrell Miller flunked a catalog of dope tests.

Ruiz was instantly written off, widely discounted as fodder, a man Joshua could shine against in his American debut. He was supposed to be the walk-on part, and the script had been accurate until Ruiz climbed up from a third-round knockdown. Ultimately he'd wind up the star.

First, Joshua was caught wading in by a left hook that floored him and left his senses scrambled until the end came in the seventh. Then, after the final bell, some said he hadn't so much been beaten as he had bailed out. Questions needed to be answered, and Joshua did so emphatically.

He defeated Ruiz in every department in Saudi Arabia. He was patient, disciplined and focused. He didn't give Ruiz a chance.

He jabbed and moved, jabbed and held, moved and held, and he kept Ruiz honest with a stream of right hands.

Of course, afterward, the bigger-than-usual Mexican-American (he'd added 16 pounds since the first fight) said he hadn't trained properly, that he'd eaten anything and everything and that he'd partied for three months after that thrilling upset win. Sympathy was in short supply. His calls for a trilogy fight were ignored by everyone not in the Andy Ruiz business.

Saudi Arabia will likely become a major player in world sport, not only because of 2019's Event of the Year but because of the high-level tennis and soccer it is also hosting. More big fights will probably head there in time. Organizers and promoters heralded it as an almighty success, but they were made to sweat for a while – and not just because of the event taking place on controversial soil, but because of rain.

After a spotless buildup week, the heavens opened on the day of the fight, jeopardizing the event and certainly large sections of the undercard. There were murmurs of cancellations and postponements. It seemed the evening hung in the balance, but the weather just about held. Ringsiders were soaked and there were puddles everywhere, but the giant canopy over the canvas meant that Joshua could go about making history as one of four fighters to immediately regain the heavyweight title, putting his name alongside Floyd Patterson, Muhammad Ali and Lennox Lewis.

It was a historic night. The stadium looked spectacular. It took place with an unusual, divisive and controversial backdrop. Matchroom said it was about opening up new markets for the sport. Some listened. Money talked. ★

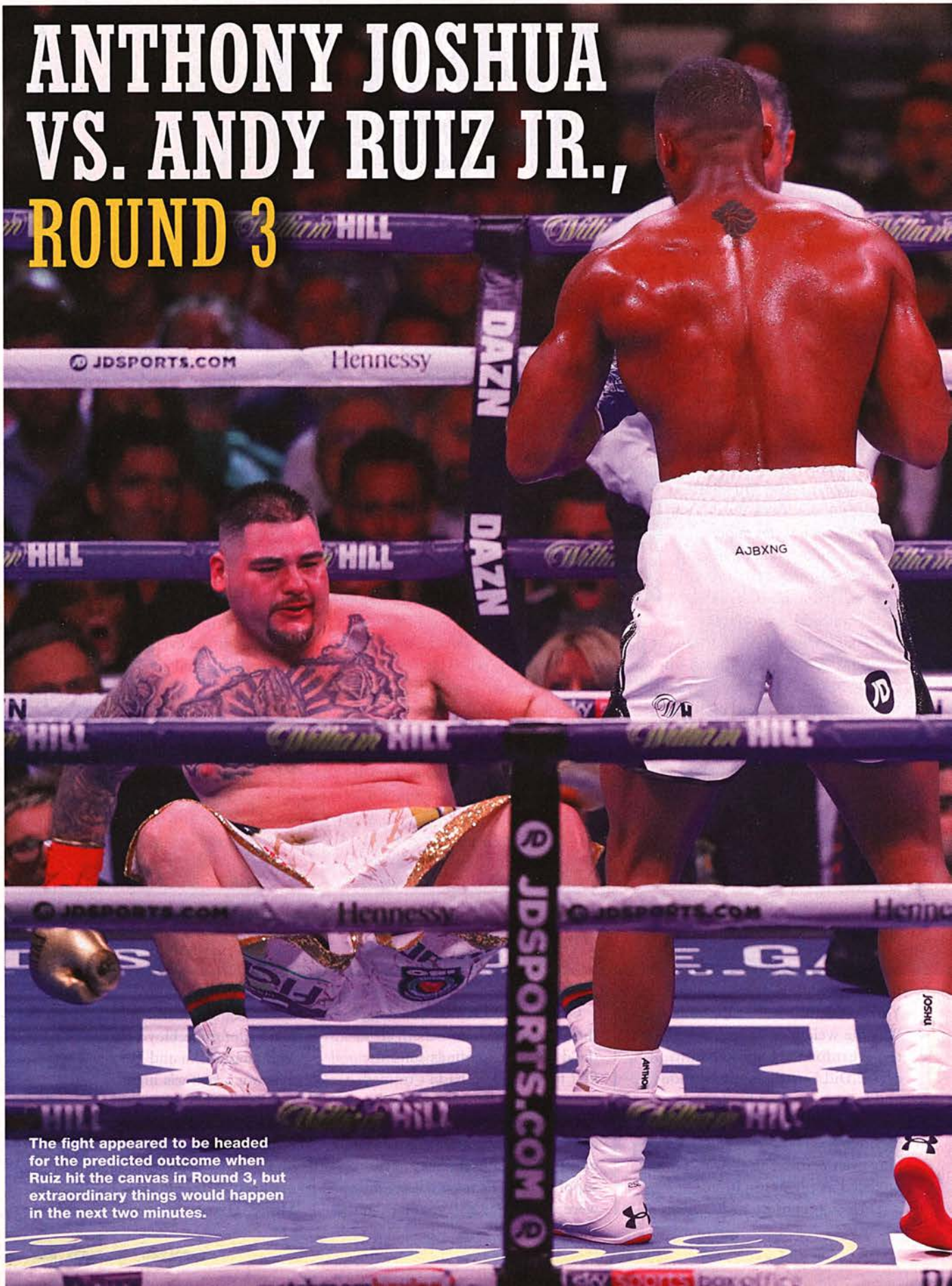
OTHER NOMINEES:

- Naoya Inoue vs. Nonito Donaire
- KSI vs. Logan Paul
- Errol Spence Jr.-Mikey Garcia
- Errol Spence Jr.-Shawn Porter

(LEFT) FAYEZ NURELDINE; VALERY SHARIFULIN/TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM

ANTHONY JOSHUA VS. ANDY RUIZ JR., ROUND 3



The fight appeared to be headed for the predicted outcome when Ruiz hit the canvas in Round 3, but extraordinary things would happen in the next two minutes.

Expectations toppled. Perceptions were altered. Up was down. Down was up. It all happened in just three minutes. Anthony Joshua didn't remember anything about it. But everybody else did, especially an overweight and underrated Andy Ruiz Jr.

It was a third round unforgettable enough to be The Ring's Round of the Year.

How it happened is astonishing.

Why it happened is still something of a mystery.

Yet that combination – the how and the why – makes the third round at New York's Madison Square Garden on June 1 more than just a snapshot of a significant heavyweight upset. It's a keeper, a reminder that chaos is the only sure thing.

Joshua landed in New York from London for his first bout in America as a huge favorite. His U.K. fans followed him like a concert crowd. They filled the Garden, singing "Sweet Caroline," a serenade to a fighter they believed would be the world's next great heavyweight. Ruiz was the stand-in, a late sub for Jarrell Miller, disqualified for a positive PED test.

Ruiz, about a 15-1 underdog at opening bell, looked as if he was there just to pick up some meal money. Given a few rounds, Joshua would finish him, take a few bows and go on to fulfill his destiny. The third round appeared to be exactly that moment, at least in the early going.

At about 43 seconds of the round, Joshua threw a straight right. Seconds later, he followed with a right uppercut and a left hook. Ruiz went down, flat on his backside. He looked dazed as he glanced up at the referee, Canadian Michael Griffin. The crowd erupted, thinking the inevitable had landed.

Turns out, looks were deceiving. Ruiz had other ideas.

Ruiz, who would become the first heavyweight champion of Mexican descent, got up midway through Griffin's count and suddenly had the transformed look of a man who had decided the fight was just beginning.

Turns out it was.

"That was a lucky shot," Ruiz recalled. "I wasn't that hurt, because I wasn't wobbling. I still had the fire in me. I wanted to keep on fighting. I still wanted to win the fight.

"I just got lazy. It was a punch in the blink of an eye. I thought, 'What just happened?'"

Lazy proved to be Ruiz's undoing in the rematch on December 7 when Joshua restored order to the heavyweight universe with a one-sided decision in Saudi Arabia. In June, however, lazy was temporary, quickly supplanted by ferocious energy. What happened next was astonishing.

During the next two minutes, Ruiz put Joshua's destiny on hold. Instead of "Sweet Caroline," there was silence. As the fight resumed, Joshua looked almost tentative. He stood immobile for a couple of seconds, looking at Ruiz, perhaps in an attempt to judge whether he was badly hurt. It was a moment of indecision – in retrospect a sign of what was about to transpire.

Ruiz aggressively moved forward as Joshua stepped right into range of Ruiz's hands. There is always a lot of dismissive attention on Ruiz's flabby appearance. In stark contrast to the sculpted Joshua, Ruiz's upper body has all of the muscle definition of an unmade bed. But he moves his hands like a magician. Joshua never saw them coming. About 30 seconds after Ruiz was knocked down, Joshua was on the canvas. Ruiz put him there with a quick left to the temple. He also landed a glancing right. But it is the left that proved to be the biggest punch of the round and perhaps the fight.

"A lucky punch," Joshua recalled when asked about the left before the rematch.

Lethal, too.

Joshua trainer Rob McCracken said his fighter suffered a concussion from the punch.

OTHER NOMINEES:

- Naoya Inoue-Nonito Donaire, Round 11
- Anthony Fowler-Scott Fitzgerald, Round 10
- Errol Spence Jr.-Shawn Porter, Round 11
- Irosvani Duvergel-Jerhed Fenderson, Round 3

Joshua's legs appeared to stiffen when it landed. He stumbled. Then fell. As Griffin began his count, Joshua looked up at him with blank eyes. It was a deer-in-the-headlights kind of gaze, and Ruiz saw it just as Joshua climbed to his feet while Griffin reached the count of eight.

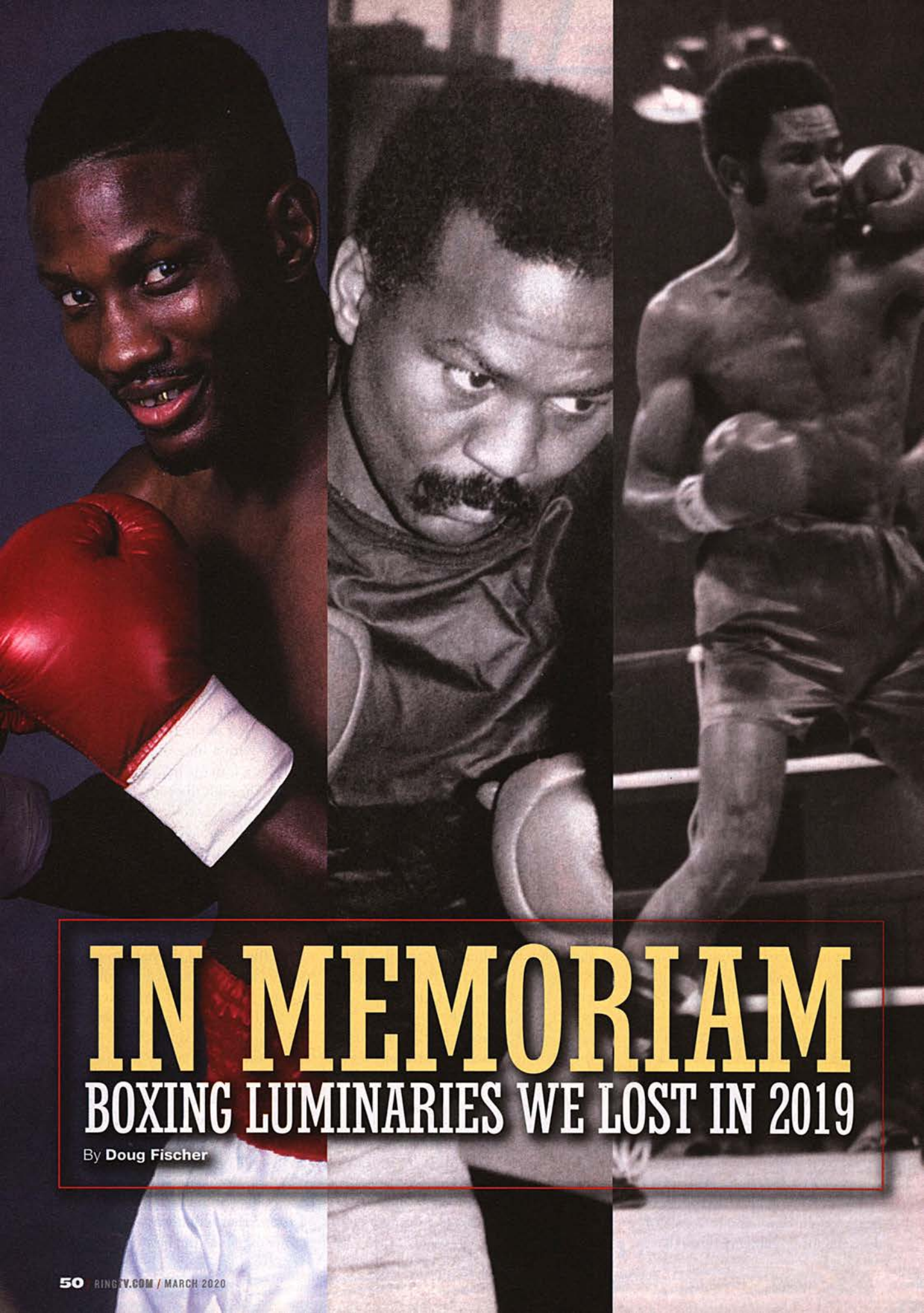
Unlike the curiously tentative Joshua in the seconds after the Ruiz knockdown, the Mexican-American immediately pursued like a hunter after wounded prey. With about 10 seconds left in the round, he swarmed Joshua with a blitz of punches, knocking him off-balance and then nearly through the ropes with a big right for a second knockdown.

The fight could have ended then and there, but Joshua got up late in Griffin's count. Griffin asked Joshua to walk to him. Joshua took one halting step toward the referee. But he didn't take a second step.

Griffin ordered the fight to continue just as the bell sounded, ending the round. Joshua might have been saved by the bell, but not saved from defeat. He was knocked down two more times and Ruiz finished him in the seventh with a TKO – all because of what happened in the third. That was evident in Joshua's confused look while on the stool before the fourth.

"He doesn't remember anything from the third round," Joshua promoter Eddie Hearn said of a round that will always be remembered as the best in 2019.

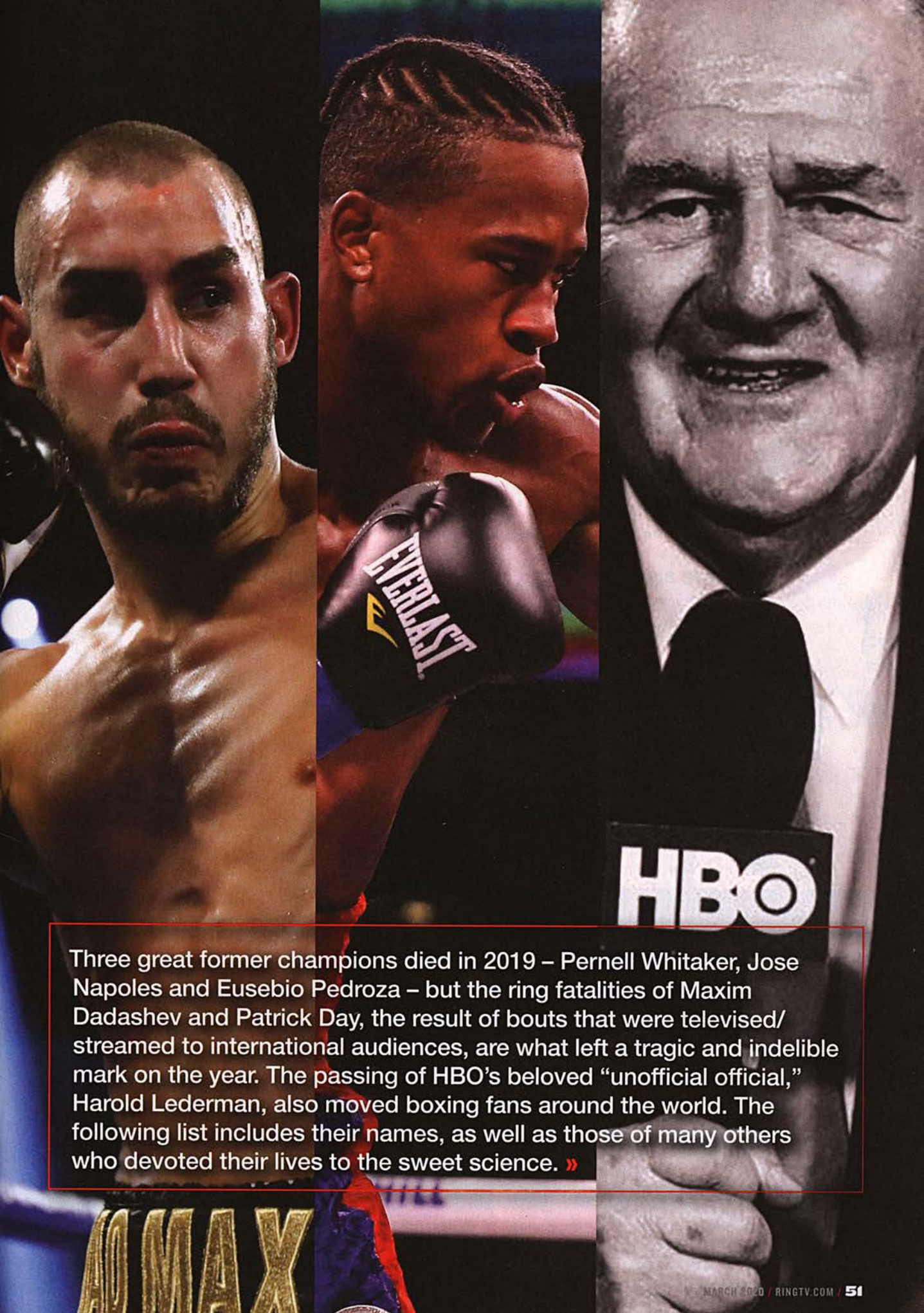
RICH GRAESSLE/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES



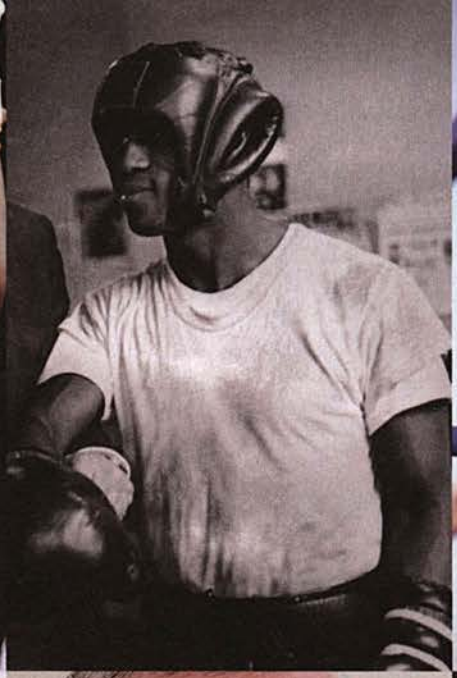
IN MEMORIAM

BOXING LUMINARIES WE LOST IN 2019

By **Doug Fischer**



Three great former champions died in 2019 – Pernell Whitaker, Jose Napoles and Eusebio Pedroza – but the ring fatalities of Maxim Dadashev and Patrick Day, the result of bouts that were televised/streamed to international audiences, are what left a tragic and indelible mark on the year. The passing of HBO's beloved "unofficial official," Harold Lederman, also moved boxing fans around the world. The following list includes their names, as well as those of many others who devoted their lives to the sweet science. »



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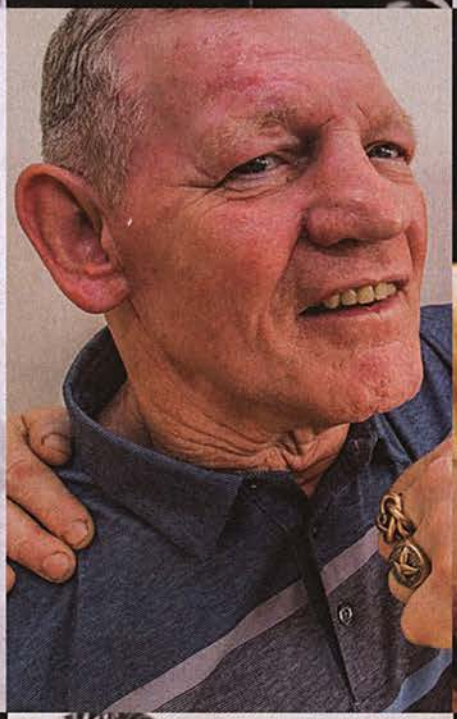


JUAN CARLOS BATISTA – Former lightweight prospect from the Dominican Republic.

LENNOX BECKLES – Junior welterweight contender during the 1960s. The Guyana native outpointed Hall of Famer Eddie Perkins in 1966.

BERT COOPER – Former heavyweight fringe contender/gatekeeper from Philadelphia who challenged Evander Holyfield and Michael Moorer in thrilling title bouts during the early 1990s.

MAXIM DADASHEV – Junior welterweight contender from Saint Petersburg, Russia.

PATRICK DAY – Junior middleweight contender from Freeport, New York.

FREEDA FOREMAN – Daughter of George Foreman who briefly fought professionally (2000-2001).

LEIGHANDRE JEGELS – Unbeaten female flyweight contender from East London, South Africa.

JOE LALLY – Popular Liverpool-area middleweight pro during the 1970s.

HAROLD LEDERMAN – Former professional boxing judge (during the 1970s, '80 and '90s) and HBO commentator (1986-2018). Lederman, who resided in Orangeburg, New York, was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2016.

ROCKY LOCKRIDGE – Former two-time junior lightweight titleholder who defeated Roger Mayweather and Cornelius Boza-Edwards and lost competitive title bouts against Hall of Famers Eusebio Pedroza, Wilfredo Gomez and Julio Cesar Chavez. His first decision loss to Tony Lopez was The Ring's 1988 Fight of the Year.

SAOUL MAMBY – Former junior welterweight titleholder who went the distance with Roberto Duran and Antonio Cervantes in the 1970s and defended his WBC belt five times, including against Esteban DeJesus in 1980. He remained a serviceable gatekeeper throughout the 1980s and early '90s.

JOSE NAPOLES – Former two-time welterweight champion and Hall of Fame inductee (1990) from Cuba who defeated fellow hall of famers Curtis Cokes and Emile Griffith, as well as top contenders Ernie Lopez and Hedgemon Lewis during two title reigns that spanned 1969-1975. Napoles challenged middleweight champion Carlos Monzon in 1974.

EUSEBIO PEDROZA – Former featherweight titleholder from Panama who made 19 defenses of the WBA belt from 1978 to 1985, defeating Hall of Famer Ruben Olivares and top contenders Rocky Lockridge (twice) and Juan LaPorte.

ELOY PEREZ – Former junior lightweight contender from Rainier, Washington, who fought out of Salinas, California. In his final fight, in 2012, he challenged Adrien Broner for the WBO title.

ABE PERVIN – Legendary trainer in the Quebec province of Canada who coached into his mid-90s and worked with several professional standouts, including former super middleweight titleholders Lucian Bute and Eric Lucas.

DANNY PHIPPEN – Popular Boston-area junior middleweight pro during the 1990s from Whitman, Massachusetts.

DWIGHT RITCHIE – Junior middleweight fringe contender from Shepparton, Australia.

HUGO SANTILLAN – Junior lightweight pro from the Santa Fe province of Argentina.

BORIS STANCHOV – Junior lightweight journeyman from Novi Iskar, Bulgaria.

JUSTIN THOMAS – Former super middleweight prospect from Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

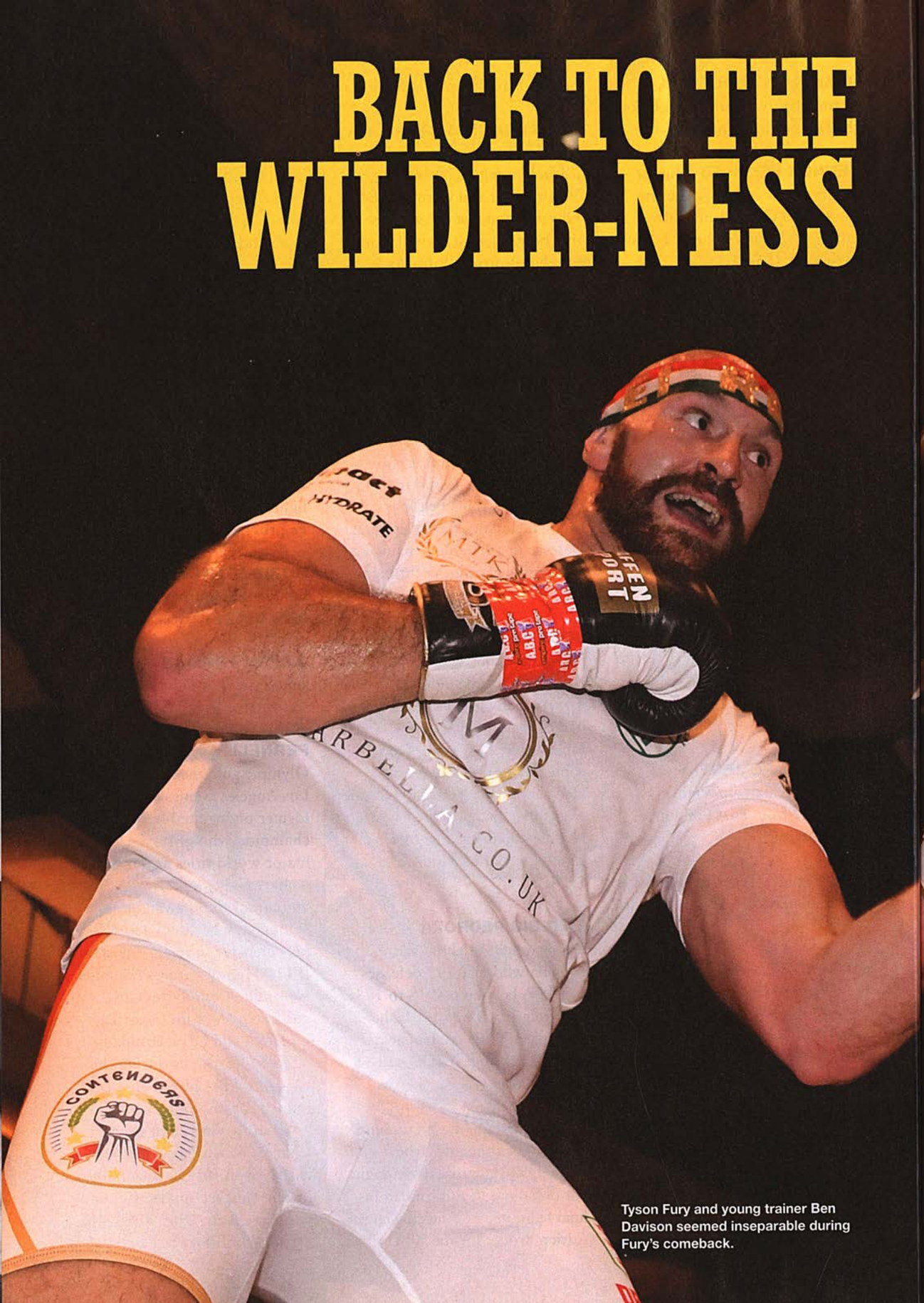
PERNELL WHITAKER – Olympic gold medalist (1984 Los Angeles Games) and former undisputed lightweight champion who also won major world titles at junior welterweight, welterweight and junior middleweight. Whitaker, who was known for his defensive prowess, defeated fellow Hall of Famers Azumah Nelson and Buddy McGirt, and extended both Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad 12 difficult rounds during the twilight of his career. He's best known for his controversial 1993 draw with Julio Cesar Chavez, which most believe he clearly won, and he was ranked in The Ring's pound-for-pound top three from 1989-1996 (No. 1 from '93-'95).

Top row: Bert Cooper, Lennox Beckles, Freeda Foreman; middle row: Leighandre Jegels, Joe Lally, Rocky Lockridge; bottom row: Saoul Mamby, Eusebio Pedroza, Eloy Perez.

BACK TO THE WILDER-NESS

HOW WILL **TYSON FURY'S** RECENT SPLIT WITH TRAINER **BEN DAVISON** AFFECT HIS DANGEROUS REMATCH WITH **DEONTAY WILDER?**

By **Gareth A Davies**



Tyson Fury and young trainer Ben Davison seemed inseparable during Fury's comeback.

Fighter and trainer splitting is hardly a new story in boxing, but the greatest talking point going into the second encounter between Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury in Las Vegas will undoubtedly be the divorce, just 10 weeks out, of the "Gypsy King" and his young trainer, Ben Davison. But if it ain't broke, why fix it ?

This was a union of fighting, fitness and mental fortitude made all the more poignant by the fact that Davison, just 26 years old, had been a close companion and confidante to Fury as he shed 140 pounds, nursed himself back to full mental health and fell back in love with the sport, culminating with that epic, dramatic, glorious WBC championship battle at Staples Center in December 2018 against Wilder. A night when raw knockout power took on the slippery skills of a boxer returning to an art he had been born into. Most insiders in the sport see the second encounter as the same thing: Can Fury outbox Wilder to the end of 12 rounds without being caught by that blunderbuss of a right hand?

Over the last three years, I have had the privilege of being around the Fury/Davison pairing in camp and during fight weeks. In the year since the first Wilder encounter, Fury has become a genuine sports star, crossing into the mainstream and drawing fascination due to his recovery and openness about issues around

It's unclear whether Davison was partially blamed for the way Fury struggled against Otto Wallin.

DAVID BECKER/GETTY IMAGES

mental health. Davison did so much behind the scenes, was involved in the thought processes and the creativity with his friend and fight colleague.

The news broke on the weekend of December 15 that they were going their separate ways, but they had ended their working relationship four days earlier, with Davison having been replaced by Javan "Sugar" Hill, nephew of late Hall of Fame trainer Emanuel Steward.

Hill will oversee Fury's training camp and work the lineal champ's corner for the Wilder rematch on February 22 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. Hill, a former Detroit police officer, has trained former light heavyweight champion Adonis Stevenson and revived the famous Kronk Gym set up by Steward in his home city.

But Fury and Davison have stayed fight amigos. Davison lived for almost a year in Fury's house and who knows, they may yet come back together in the future. There were no remonstrations, no pulling of teeth. "Tyson and myself had to both make decisions for our careers, which resulted in our working relationship coming to an end," Davison wrote soon afterward on his Twitter account. "However, we remain friends and he will smash the dosser."

It is perhaps significant, however, that Wilder's co-trainer, Jay Deas, had said publicly that Davison was a weapon in the rivalry, given his understanding of the Alabamian's strengths and weaknesses. In short, Fury will need to control the distance once more, move laterally and throw when in range before moving smartly out of the way of oncoming missiles. But as Wilder showed in the brutality of his two defenses in 2019, he has the power and the patience to wait until the range allows him to detonate to a finish. For me, they were the two knockouts of 2019 in boxing. Swift rhetoric from his fists. Emphatic, decisive, a weapon that makes him one of the most devastating and dangerous fighters in the history of the heavyweight division.

The outcome of the second fistic pairing will tell us whether the decision was right, yet instinct says it may have been hasty. If things have gone dramatically wrong, then a solution needs to be found. But what really went wrong for Fury in 2019, unless something in the dynamic between Fury and Davison has not been revealed? Sure, the fights with Tom Schwarz and Otto Wallin were hardly a showcase for the Lancastrian, but Schwarz was a coming-out party in Las Vegas under the joint banner of ESPN and Top Rank, and the fight in September went wrong only in that Fury got badly cut and the fight took a different turn. Fury was never going to be highly motivated against either of those dance partners, yet the man who once weighed 390 pounds has kept in shape, kept busy and continued with a sky-high profile, even entering into the WWE, publishing his memoirs, warts and all, and being filmed for a miniseries on television.

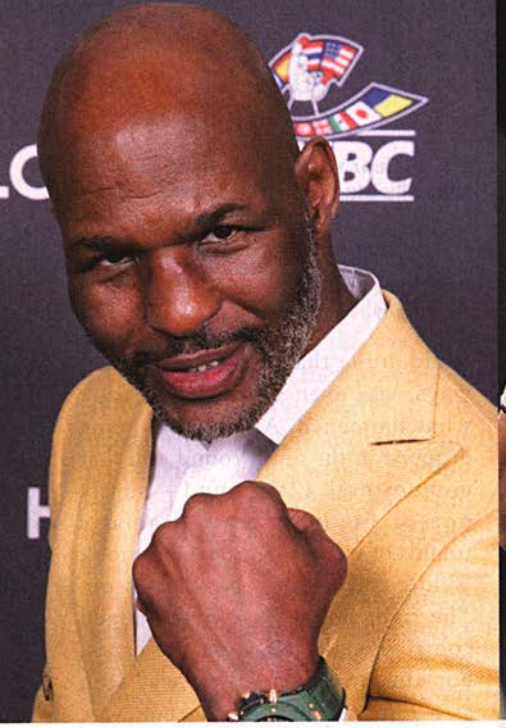
Perhaps in those very things lies the truth. Perhaps Fury crossing into mainstream consciousness has changed the relationship with Davison, who stayed away from any of Fury's ventures outside boxing. On a personal level, it seemed like a journey we wanted to see more of, a liaison that brought the best out of both men. On the surface at least, from my observations both near and far, the two were friends and colleagues and still maintained their own identities. What might worry the Gypsy King's fans is that Davison was a heavy influence in pushing Fury, never becoming a "yes man." Again, only time will tell on this.

The positive for Fury is that there is a great deal of boxing knowledge around him in his family, and they are a tight team in that sense. It is difficult, though, to see Fury taking a different approach in his second encounter with Wilder, who revealed after the first fight that he was lighter than he wanted to be and had been suffering from the flu going into the final stages of camp. There is no doubt that the second fight is dangerous for Fury, yet one could argue that the first, in many ways, was even more so. Yet look what happened. Apart from being dropped in the ninth round and that monumental 12th round – surely one of boxing's most dramatic rounds of the last decade – Fury took Wilder to task in a boxing lesson. The fight might have been judged controversially close on the cards, but almost universally it was seen as a Fury victory. In another way, the controversial denouement has brought us to this point, to a long, drawn-out debate in the intervening months, and an event to savor at the start of a new decade in the sport.

Styles make fights, and the two styles mean that in nature, Fury will be evasive and box while the other, Wilder, will hunt for the finish that he has implanted in his fighting psyche. It is what makes this mouth-watering, compelling. The key, perhaps, is that Wilder's confidence will have grown throughout 2019, when he thumped into tomorrow two men who believed, perhaps, that they could bring the American's undoing. Dominic Breazeale, hit into the East River. Luis Ortiz, confined to dust in the Mojave Desert.

Who knows, perhaps we are about to have a similar outcome the second time around and we are destined to see, as U.K. promoter Frank Warren stated late last year, a trilogy between these two fascinating heavyweights. I say perhaps so. Who could ever write Fury off, given what he did in 2015 against Wladimir Klitschko, and how he showed up brilliantly, almost biblically, in 2018. Yet there is something just a little eerie about Wilder as he searches for his destiny with those infamous words: "One face, one name, one champion."

We will know soon enough. What a start to 2020 – and the new decade.



THE CLASS RUNNETH OVER

WITH NEW ELIGIBILITY RULES IN PLACE, THE INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME'S CLASS OF 2020 IS A STAR-STUDDED GROUP

By **Lee Groves**

This past April, the International Boxing Hall of Fame's board of directors approved reforms designed to expand its universe of opportunity. In December, those reforms produced one of the largest, strongest and most well-received classes in the hall's history.

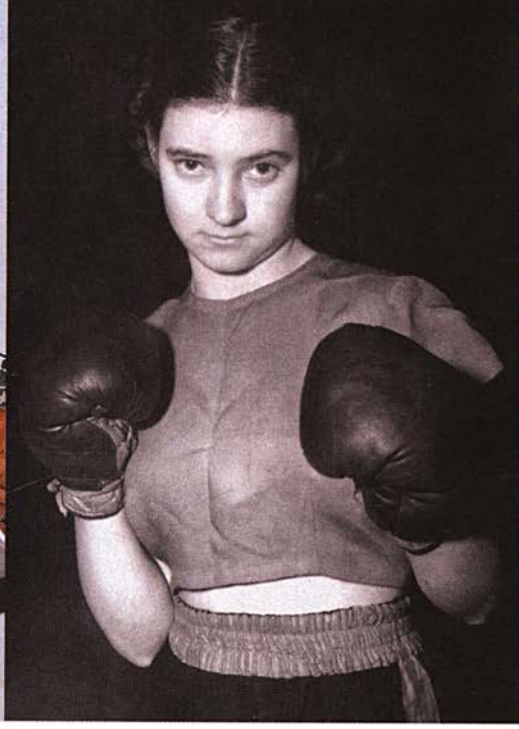
Every name in the Class of 2020 – **Bernard Hopkins, Juan Manuel Marquez** and **Shane Mosley** in the male Modern class; **Christy Martin** and **Lucia Rijker** in the inaugural female Modern category, **Barbara Buttrick** as the first female Trailblazer honoree, Non-participants **Lou DiBella, Kathy Duva** and **Dan Goossen**, Observers **Bernard Fernandez** and **Thomas Hauser,** Pioneer **Paddy Ryan** and "early era" Old Timer **Frank Erne** – was one that had a Hall-worthy resume, and the good news for the IBHOF is that many of the names that didn't get in this year may well earn entry in the future thanks to the strength of their respective accomplishments.

Three of the IBHOF's reforms profoundly reshaped this year's voting landscape: the reduction of the mandatory waiting period for eligibility for the Modern categories from five years to three years, the temporary removal of names that had experienced 10 or more unsuccessful voting cycles and the introduction of two categories exclusively for female boxers. The first two changes resulted in a massive influx of new names – 12 among the Moderns, 24 in the Non-participants and 19 in the Observers – and the introduction of the third was a most welcome and well-timed move given today's global renaissance in the women's game. For voters, the variety of new choices made for an excruciating whittling-down process, especially for those sifting through the Non-participant and Observer ballots. In the end, a trio of promoters and a pair of journalists got the call from the hall.

The reduced waiting period had the biggest effect in the men's Modern race. Marquez, whose last fight was in 2014, would have been a first-ballot entry under the previous protocol, and had the old rules remained in place, fellow 2014 retirees Sergio Martinez and Carl Froch would have had a strong chance to join the Mexican great. But by bringing in fighters who retired in 2015 and 2016, Martinez and Froch were superseded by the overwhelming résumés of 2016 retirees Hopkins and Mosley.

Hopkins was nicknamed "The Executioner" – at first for his punching prowess, then for his ability to execute a game plan – then "The Alien" for his otherworldly successes in his middle and late 40s. The Philadelphian's record is that of a genuine all-time great: a record 20 middleweight title defenses over a reign spanning more than a decade,

HOPKINS: OMAR VEGA/HUBLOT VIA GETTY IMAGES; MARQUEZ: JEFF BOTTARI/GETTY IMAGES; MOSLEY: CASSY ATH-



Class of 2020 (left to right): Bernard Hopkins, Juan Manuel Marquez, Shane Mosley, Christy Martin, Lucia Rijker, Barbara Buttrick.

three victories that shattered pre-fight conventional wisdom (Felix Trinidad, Kelly Pavlik, Antonio Tarver) and – on three separate occasions – becoming the oldest fighter ever to win a major boxing title, the last being Beibut Shumenov's WBA light heavyweight belt at 49 years and 106 days. Hopkins also was the first fighter to become an undisputed champion in the four-belt era and was named The Ring's 2001 Fighter of the Year. His extraordinary 28-year professional career ended with a mark of 55-8-2 (32 KOs).

Mosley – who will join fellow "Sugars" Robinson and Leonard – was an exponent of "power boxing," which blended blinding hand speed with an aggressive mindset and a pair of heavy hands. Following a 230-12 amateur career, Mosley dethroned IBF lightweight titlist Philip Holiday on points and registered eight successful title defenses – all by knockout. Mosley vacated the belt and boldly bypassed the 140-pounders in favor of chasing a belt at welterweight, which he achieved after scoring the signature victory of his career, a split decision over WBC titleholder Oscar De La Hoya. Three successful defenses against Antonio Diaz, Shannan Taylor and Adrian Stone lifted Mosley's record to 38-0 (35 KOs) and put him atop the pound-for-pound list. After dropping back-to-back decisions to Vernon Forrest and incurring a three-round no-contest against Raul Marquez, Mosley became a three-division titlist by defeating De La Hoya a second time for the Ring, WBA and WBC junior middleweight titles. Other highlights include victories over John John Molina, Jesse James Leija, Fernando Vargas (twice), Ricardo Mayorga (twice), Pablo Cesar Cano and Antonio Margarito, which enabled Mosley, at 37 years and 149 days, to become the oldest fighter to win a widely recognized welterweight title (that mark has since been surpassed by Randall Bailey in June 2012, then by Manny Pacquiao this past July). Mosley ended his 23-year career with a record of 49-10-1 (41 KOs).

Marquez weathered the storm posed by the 2015 and 2016 retirees because he was considered one of his generation's most technically skilled fighters and because the weight of his accomplishments merited such respect. A disqualification loser in his pro debut and an upset points loser in his first title opportunity against then-WBA featherweight beltholder Freddie Norwood, Marquez won titles in four weight classes and was on the winning side of two Ring Fights of the Year (KO 9 Juan Diaz in 2009, KO 6 Manny Pacquiao in 2012). He logged a 10-5-1 (3 KOs) record in world title fights, with two of the losses and the draw coming against Pacquiao and another of the defeats by unanimous but disputed decision against Chris John in Indonesia. Marquez's victims include Manuel Medina, Derrick Gainer, Orlando Salido, Pacquiao (fourth meeting), Marco Antonio Barrera, Joel Casamayor, Juan Diaz (twice) and, in his final bout, Mike Alvarado. Marquez ended his 21-year career with a 56-7-1 (40 KOs) record.

Martin and Rijker lifted the women's game to unprecedented heights in the 1990s, and they were even scheduled to share the same ring in 2005. Instead, they will share the same stage in Canastota.

Martin, a native of Mullens, West Virginia, began boxing on a dare in 1986 while still a student at Concord University in nearby Athens. Her athletic background – she was a scholarship-level basketball player – surely helped her cause as she went on to win that Toughwoman contest as well as several others. She turned pro in 1989 and fought fellow debutante Angela Buchanan to a five-round draw. She avenged the draw three weeks later by blasting out Buchanan inside of two rounds,

and her five-round majority decision loss to Andrea DeShong two fights later would represent the last blemish for the next nine years. Not only did Martin avenge the DeShong defeat five months later, her slam-bang style and string of knockouts drew the attention of promoter Don King. After watching video of Martin, the future Hall of Famer (Class of 1997) signed her to a promotional contract, the first he ever extended to a woman. Martin increased her profile thanks to her appearances on several King-promoted undercards featuring Evander Holyfield, Felix Trinidad and Julio Cesar Chavez among others, but it was her six-round decision victory over Deirdre Gogarty on the Mike Tyson-Frank Bruno II pay-per-view that vaulted Martin into the mainstream, so much so that she became the first female boxer to grace the cover of Sports Illustrated. Martin went on to defeat DeShong in their third meeting, and added the names of Isra Girgrah, Marcela Acuna, Belinda Laracuente, Kathy Collins, Mia St. John (first meeting) and future spouse Lisa Holewyne to her win column. Martin completed her 19-year career with a record of 49-7-3 (31 KOs).

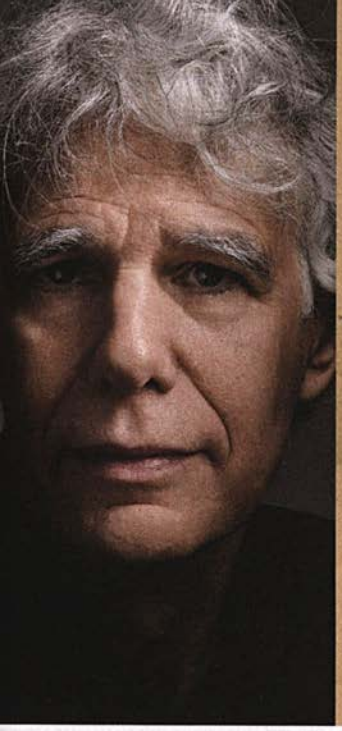
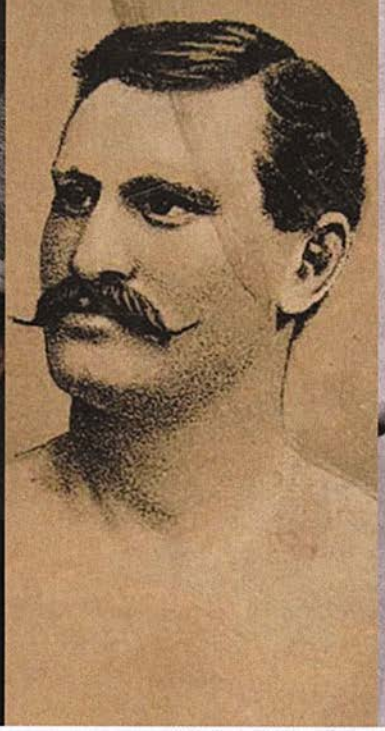
Rijker, the first native of the Netherlands to be honored by the IBHOF, more than lived up to her nickname of "The Dutch Destroyer," and, like Martin, boasted an excellent athletic background. She began studying judo at age 6, won a national fencing championship at 14 just one year after taking up the sport, and, at 15, knocked out the reigning American kickboxing champion. After assembling a 37-0 kickboxing record, Rijker moved to Los Angeles in 1994 to pursue a boxing career. Rijker's high-end technique and one-punch power moved the media to call her "the most dangerous woman in the world," and her victims include Chevelle Hallback, Andrea DeShong, Marcela Acuna and Jane Couch. A dream match between Rijker and Martin almost became reality after Rijker's star turn in Million Dollar Baby, but a ruptured Achilles suffered by the Netherlander forced the fight to be canceled. Rijker's eight-year career ended at 17-0 (14 KOs).

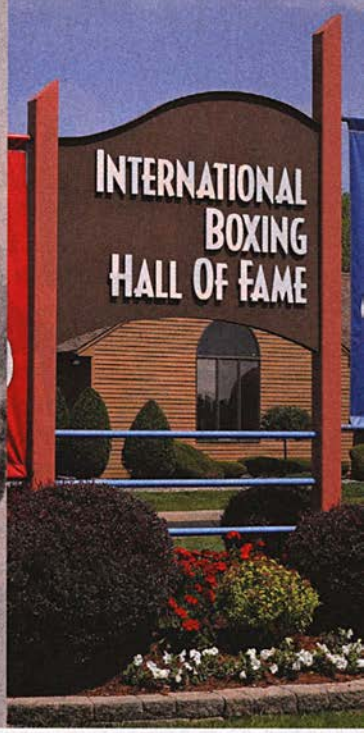
Buttrick was as much of a lock in the Trailblazers category as Hopkins, Marquez, Mosley, Martin and Rijker were in the Moderns, for she was the embodiment of her category's name. Because the British Boxing Board of Control banned professional boxing for women, the 4-foot-11, 98-pounder boxed hundreds of exhibitions at fairs in England and France as part of a traveling boxing troupe. She traveled to the U.S. in 1952 with husband/trainer Len Smith and was recognized as the women's world flyweight champion. The only loss in her 30-1-1 record was against JoAnn Hagen, who outweighed Buttrick by 30 pounds, and she laid claim to the women's world bantamweight title by defeating Phyllis Kugler in 1957. After her career, she became a licensed manager and trainer, and in 1993 she founded the Women's International Boxing Federation.

The trio of promoters elected to the Class of 2020 also boast strong credentials. DiBella was the vice president in charge of programming at HBO between 1989-2000, was the creative force behind HBO's Boxing After Dark series, and, as the CEO of DiBella Entertainment, created the popular Broadway Boxing series.

Goossen, who died in 2014 from liver cancer, formed the family-run Ten Goose Boxing in 1982, from which titleholders Gabriel and Rafael Ruelas, Michael Nunn and Terry Norris were developed. After serving as a Top Rank VP, Goossen formed several promotional companies (America Presents, Goossen Tutor Promotions, Goossen Promotions) and was one of the five promoters involved in the Super Six World Boxing Classic. His charge, Andre Ward, ended up winning the Showtime-televised super middleweight tournament.

Duva – who will join her late husband, Dan (Class of 2003), and



Class of 2020 (left to right): Lou DiBella, Kathy Duva, Dan Goossen, Bernard Fernandez, Thomas Hauser, Paddy Ryan, Frank Erne.

her late father-in-law, Lou (Class of 1998), in the IBHOF – has been CEO of Main Events since Dan's death in 1996 and is one of the sport's most successful and respected figures. She orchestrated boxing's return to network TV with The NBC Boxing Series in 2003-04 and Fight Night on NBC in 2012 while also partnering with ESPN to bring pay-per-view boxing to that network. The roll call of stars she has worked with include those already in the IBHOF (Evander Holyfield, Lennox Lewis, Pernell Whitaker, Arturo Gatti, Mike McCallum) and those who hope to get there someday (Sergey Kovalev, Fernando Vargas, Tomasz Adamek, Michael Moorer, Meldrick Taylor, Vinny Paz, Joel Casamayor and many more).

Journalists Fernandez and Hauser – both of whom have written extensively for The Ring – are fitting additions to the Observer wing.

Fernandez, who has won more than 100 awards for writing and public service, earned the 1998 Nat Fleischer Award for Excellence in Boxing Journalism and the 2015 Barney Nagler Award for Long and Meritorious Service to Boxing. Part of that service included five terms as Boxing Writers Association of America president, and his elevation will mark the sixth time the IBHOF inducted a New Orleans native. He will join boxers Joe Brown (Class of 1996), Pete Herman (Class of 1997), Willie Pastrano (Class of 2001) and Harry Wills (Class of 2002) as well as trainer Whitey Esneault (Class of 2016), a man for whom Fernandez advocated and on whose behalf he delivered the acceptance speech. Now he will get to speak for himself.

In 1991, Hauser wrote Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times, which is regarded by most as the definitive Ali biography. Hauser will join "The Greatest" in the IBHOF due to his prolific writing career, which includes 52 books and hundreds of investigative articles that have earned him numerous writing awards. His Ali biography won him the 1991 William Hill Sports Book of the Year and his work earned him the BWAA's 2004 Nat Fleischer Award, one of dozens of honors from the organization. His deeply detailed and penetrating articles have appeared in The New York Times, The New York Sun, The Ring, The Sweet Science and BoxingScene, among other platforms.

Pioneer Paddy Ryan, a native of Ireland, settled in Troy, New York, when Ryan was 8. He began boxing under Jimmy Killoran, the athletic director at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He competed in several contests, most notably against Joe McAuliffe, Joe Goss (from whom he won the American heavyweight championship in 1880 after 87 rounds) and John L. Sullivan, who stopped Ryan in nine rounds two years later.

Erne is the only Class of 2020 inductee who had appeared on a previous ballot. A fighter who banked more on ring generalship than raw power, Erne twice defeated Jack Skelly by KO and won titles at featherweight and lightweight from George Dixon and George "Kid" Lavigne, respectively, after having fought to draws with them. His final record reads 31-6-16 (15 KOs).

The IBHOF's annual induction weekend is scheduled for June 11-14, 2020.

Lee Groves is a boxing writer and historian based in Friendly, West Virginia. He has been an elector for the International Boxing Hall of Fame since 2001 and is also a writer, researcher and punch-counter for CompuBox, Inc. He is the author of "Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics."

BOMBS AWAY

WITH SO MANY ONE-PUNCH KNOCKOUT VICTIMS IN HIS WAKE, **DEONTAY WILDER** IS CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE THE HARDEST HITTER OF ALL TIME

By **Don Stradley**

Some day years after he has retired from boxing, Deontay Wilder will be sitting in the plush playroom of his Tuscaloosa mansion. Several big-screen TVs will be playing his greatest knockouts on a loop; his bronze mask and various costumes will be encased in glass behind him. As he playfully caresses a bronze cast of his famous right fist, he'll take some questions from a local high school newspaper reporter, waxing nostalgic about the year 2019. "Oh yeah," the "Bronze Bomber" will say. "That was when they started calling me the greatest puncher of all time. I don't blame them for saying that. I'd just knocked out David Ortiz again." The reporter will gently remind Wilder that it was Luis Ortiz, not David. "Yeah," Wilder will say. "I knocked all their asses out." At the end of the Q&A, Wilder might even put on the old mask for a quick photo shoot. It'll be a nice interview. As the rookie reporter is escorted from the premises by Wilder's butler, the retired titlist will sit back in his big leather chair and look up at the clip of him blasting out Dominic Breazeale. He'll smile and think about the old days...

With his stunning knockout of Ortiz last November, a question rippled across the boxing landscape: Is Wilder the greatest heavyweight puncher in history? Granted, for a good portion of the folks trumpeting Wilder, history doesn't go back farther than, say, the Obama administration. Then again, with 41 knockouts in 43 bouts, his boosters are entitled to be excited. Wilder is especially intriguing because it's been quite a few years since we've had a legitimately scary heavyweight hitter. Sure, Samuel Peter, Lamon Brewster, and David Tua were all big punchers, but they didn't become major stars. Long-reigning champion Wladimir Klitschko had a strong right hand but too often seemed hesitant to use it. That's why Wilder is refreshing. You will never hear trainers Jay Deas or Mark Breland begging Wilder to throw his right hand. Rest assured, he will throw it. He will throw it hard.

Wilder also fascinates because we can't quite figure out how he does it, and he never seems to do it the same way twice. Sometimes he throws roundhouse punches that seem lifted from old Popeye cartoons. At other times, he'll throw a textbook right cross down the middle. Naturally, self-described boxing gurus will try to explain the science and technique of Wilder's punching. They'll talk nonstop about his height and leverage

The right hand that knocked out Luis Ortiz was further proof of Deontay Wilder's extreme punching power.

STEVE MARCUS/GETTY IMAGES

and torque. While such explanations are mildly amusing, the real trick to Wilder's power might be the element of surprise. He does things in such an unorthodox way that opponents don't really know what's coming. When fighting Wilder, it's as if his punches fall out of the sky like meteors.

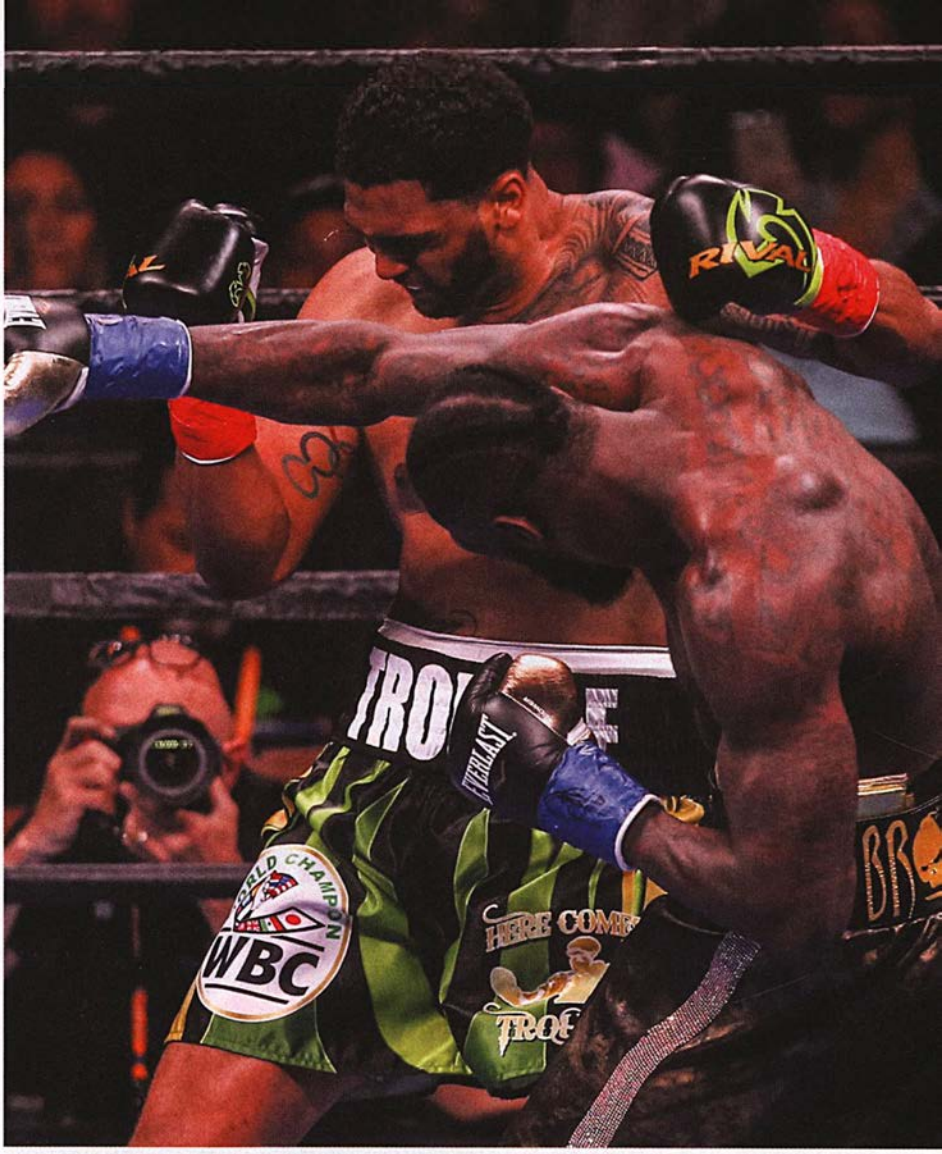
But rather than trying to solve the riddle of Wilder's power, we should be happy that he exists. The sport honors all kinds of fighters, but nothing drives the business like a heavyweight knockout artist. Whether or not Wilder is the best ever, he's in some outstanding company.

Perhaps the most devastating puncher of the early days of gloved boxing was Bob Fitzsimmons, who was no more than a rangy middleweight but was perfectly comfortable fighting men who outweighed him by 25 pounds or more. He won the heavyweight championship in 1897 from James J. Corbett with the infamous "solar plexus punch," but his best weapon was a screaming overhand right that helped him score 57 victories inside the distance. Perhaps his most brutal knockout came on August 10, 1900, in a sweltering Madison Square Garden. On that night, Fitzsimmons scored an astonishing sixth-round stoppage of Gus Ruhlin, "The Akron Giant." Ruhlin took a right to the jaw and fell face-first, as the Buffalo Courier described, "as if struck by an axe." According to old ringside reports, Ruhlin needed several minutes to regain consciousness and an additional four hours at a nearby bathhouse before he fully recovered.

Fitzsimmons' record is filled with similar stories of opponents being knocked cold. For years, old-time fight experts would declare the likes of Jack Dempsey and Joe Louis couldn't compare to Fitz because they didn't knock men into comas. However, the dark side of Fitzsimmons' legacy is that he fought when there were no specific rules about how hands could be wrapped. In his day, fighters tried soaking wraps in a mixture of alcohol and gum, wrapping a fist with insulation tape and experiments with plaster, among many other things. Indeed, men who worked in Fitzsimmons' camp came forward in later years and told reporters that "Ruby Robert" was quite devious with his wraps. A 1904 story in the Salt Lake Telegram quoted a "well-known handler of boxers" who claimed Fitzsimmons would "put moistened plaster of paris on his linen bandages and let the mass grow hard. Then he would have a rocky ridge across his hand that could be felt straight through the glove." Jim Jeffries, who twice defeated him, swore that Fitzsimmons' punches were unusually painful, almost inhuman.

Loaded-glove rumors followed Dempsey for much of his life, which was a testament to his own wicked punch. In his early career, he endured his share of losses, draws and no-decision bouts, but in 1918 Dempsey came into his own as a knockout puncher, scoring 17 KOs in 21 bouts. After his demolition of Jess Willard for the championship in 1919, Dempsey became an American phenomenon. He went Hollywood a few years into his reign, but for many generations to come he represented the ultimate in punching. He did most of his damage with a left hook.

Many Depression-era boxing fans predicted Max Baer would be the next Dempsey. Getting hit by Baer, to paraphrase one of his knockout victims, was like having a house fall on you. Baer never quite lived up



Dominic Breazeale survived for a little over two minutes before succumbing to Wilder's right hand.

to the initial hype, but 51 of his 66 career wins were knockouts. Most came courtesy of a right hand that was like a wrecking ball.

Joe Louis was the heavyweight champion for nearly 12 years, thanks to his punch. Fans of the period would debate ad nauseam whether Louis hit harder than Dempsey. In 2003, Louis was selected as Ring Magazine's best puncher in our 100 Greatest Punchers of All Time issue while Dempsey was rated at No. 7, so apparently that old argument has been settled. The late trainer Eddie Futch, who had been Louis' sparring partner, once explained that merely sparring with Louis could be perilous: "Even if he didn't hit you much, just blocking those shots was like being in an automobile accident." Louis was vicious with either hand and specialized in short, quick punches. "If he hit you with a shot, you never saw the punch coming. You just saw a light in your head. Like a camera flash going off. Bang."

And so it went for most of the previous century, with each generation getting its own heavyweight knockout king. There was Rocky Marciano in the 1950s, scuttling forward like a crab to land his haymakers. Then came Sonny Liston, a brutal puncher who could knock men down with his jab. The early 1970s saw George Foreman take his crude power all the way to the championship. Even during the second phase of his career, when he seemed to be in the business for laughs, Foreman could still crack. When he regained the championship at age 45 with his knockout of Michael Moorer in 1994, the left-right combination that ended the fight was not too different from the way Wilder stopped Ortiz recently. It may look a bit different because Wilder and Foreman have such dissimilar physiques, but the principle was the same: a quick left to blind the opponent followed immediately by a stiff right.

Earnie Shavers had frightening power, but he never had the chin or stamina to go with it. He was KO'd seven times himself. One of his conquerors was Ron Lyle, an inconsistent performer who also wielded a major punch. Lyle's 1976 bout with Foreman was a classic display of bombs-away punching, with both men on the canvas twice before Big George won by KO in the fifth. The 1970s was simply a golden era for heavyweight sluggers, with highlight-reel KOs coming on a regular basis.

Of course, the generation that grew up watching Mike Tyson in the 1980s will always consider him the biggest banger of all. But as his career wore on, his power seemed to dissipate; he couldn't even hurt Lennox Lewis, who wasn't known for having a granite chin. Then again, a conversation about great heavyweight punchers could also include Lewis. He was such a clever boxer that we sometimes forget the many impressive knockouts on his record, none more devastating than his 2001 stoppage of Hasim Rahman to regain the championship. The right hand that ended Rahman's reign was as good as it gets.

Whether Wilder is history's greatest heavyweight puncher is a hot topic for the moment. The way boxing fans are, if he fails to score a knockout in his next bout, they'll be leaping off the bandwagon pretty quickly. In the meantime, Wilder has plenty of supporters who will argue in his favor. The problem is that their reasoning relies too heavily on his knockout percentage, which currently stands at a whopping 95.35 percent. That's a hell of a number, but KO percentages are misleading. Vitali Klitschko carried a similar ratio for most of his career and retired in 2012 with a percentage of 87.23 over 45 fights. Vitali scored plenty of stoppages, but with his style of wearing opponents down over several rounds you couldn't describe him as a one-punch destroyer. Liston, as fearsome as any puncher, had a rather modest KO percentage of 72.22 percent over 54 fights. If a fighter's knockout percentage meant anything, we'd be hailing Vitali Klitschko as a great knockout artist ahead of Liston, Louis and others who were obviously harder punchers but had lower KO ratios.

Where Wilder shines is in the absolute finality of his knockout victories. He doesn't wear opponents down. He practically knocks them through the canvas. And sometimes he loses almost every round before landing the big one. "I've said it so often: These guys I'm fighting, they have to be perfect for 12 rounds, but I only have to be perfect for two seconds," Wilder said after stopping Ortiz. The fact that he is doing his knockout business in the modern era of supersized heavyweights is also interesting. He's knocking out some huge men. And like Fitzsimmons, Dempsey, Louis and Marciano, Wilder is actually lighter than most of his opponents.

Even Wilder seems mystified by his ability to knock men into a stupor. He has credited God, some mysterious factor that he was blessed with at birth and even his use of positive thinking to harness the power of the universe. The way some of his rivals look when they fall, it definitely seems Wilder has the entire universe in his gloves.

Whether Wilder is really the best heavyweight puncher in history is impossible to know. But he is certainly comparable to the greats of the past in one way: When he enters the ring, we hold our breath as if waiting for some sort of explosion. Besides, just the fact that he's being considered the best is rather amazing. It sure beats some of the other things being said about him. When he's retired, will he also remember that a certain number of fans thought he lacked fundamentals, fought weak opposition and wouldn't last five rounds with Tim Witherspoon? Then again, the mansion in Tuscaloosa will make it easy to forget his critics.

SHE'S GOT GAME

DANIELLE PERKINS' BASKETBALL CAREER WAS CUT SHORT, BUT HER PIVOT TO BOXING COULD BE THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Danielle Perkins always loved boxing. So it was too bad that she was really good at basketball.

"Basketball came first," she said. "It paid my college tuition and it took me all over the world, so even the idea of boxing had to take a back seat. But once I got my opportunity, I took advantage of it."

A former college basketball player for St. John's University in New York, Perkins went on to play pro ball everywhere from Puerto Rico and Germany to the Czech Republic and Spain. But while back home in Brooklyn for the holidays in 2008, Perkins' life changed forever when she got hit by a taxi near the place where Barclays Center now stands.

"(The driver) was going 30 miles an hour, she slammed on the brakes and I flew off the hood and my head scuttled across the cement," Perkins recalled. "They brought me to Kings County (Hospital) and they thought I got shot in the head, because the back of my head was opened."

The diagnosis? A fractured skull, dislocated shoulder and a back injury that included nerve damage. Doctors said she would never walk again, let alone play basketball. Perkins would walk again after nearly eight months of therapy, but a trip to play in Turkey a month after the accident obviously didn't happen.

"I got depressed and was out of it after that," she said. She went through some dark times until she decided the accident wasn't going to define the rest of her life. Not at 26.

"I just snapped out of it," Perkins said. "I was like, 'I've got to get myself together. This is not gonna be the end of me.' And it wasn't."

That's when that boxing opportunity she mentioned came up. Actually, it didn't come up until 2014, when she found her way to Gleason's Gym and discovered a passion that soon had her in the ring competing for a New York Golden Gloves title.

"Once I started boxing, my mom was so nervous for my first fight," Perkins said. "She asked me, 'Are you gonna have your helmet on?' And she came to my fight and I knocked the girl out in 40 seconds. My mom's like, 'Boxing's great.'"

Perkins' second amateur fight is on YouTube, and in it she already looks to be a natural in the ring. That fight was against top amateur heavyweight Krystal Dixon, and again, Perkins emerged victorious.

"There was a lot of hype around that fight because Krystal at the time was the number one heavyweight and was on Team USA," said the 6-foot, 210-pound Perkins. "But I always think of it like a street fight, and if I look across the ring and I don't think you can beat me in a street fight, I'm not concerned. That gets rid of all the nerves, and I just flow with it. We're gonna fight."

Five years later, Perkins is apparently here to stay. Despite the injuries sustained in the 2008 accident, she has passed all tests with flying colors.

"I'm one hundred percent healthy," she said. "No nerve damage, nothing wrong with my skull, my shoulder's fine and so is my back."

Her performances in the ring prove her words, as she's compiled a list of accomplishments that include the New York Golden Gloves title, a win in the Open National Regional in her adopted hometown of Houston, a 2016 National title and a bronze medal in the 2018 World Championships.

Perkins wasn't done yet, though, and in October, she defeated China's Yang Xiaoli to win a gold medal in the AIBA Elite Women's World Championships. Normally, that would be a ticket to a spot in the 2020 Olympics, but with no division above light heavyweight in the Tokyo Games, there are no mountains left to climb for her as an amateur.

"I think everyone has an Olympic dream, and as an athlete, if you can compete at that level, there's nothing like it," she said. "Even getting on the podium to hear the national anthem (at the World Championships) and get the award, it was like, 'Man, I would love to do this at the Olympics.' It was a bit disappointing."

But the 37-year-old is undeterred. She's in boxing for the long haul, and she's already got her 2020 planned out.

"I'm gonna go pro. I want all the belts and I want all the smoke," Perkins said. "Everybody can come line up; we can fight every week if you'd like to. When I go pro, I want all of these belts, because I want everyone to have to fight me for them. I want to be the queen of the heavyweight division, and if you want to take the throne, you're gonna have to really fight me. So I want to have a title, maybe two, before the year is over. World titles, not anything light. That's what I'll be chasing in 2020."

Spoken like a true New Yorker. And as such, does she ever hit the courts to show the young kids a thing or two?

"Of course," she said. "If someone calls me out, I say, 'Listen, this used to be my job.' So I can punch in any time and show these kids a little something."

2019 WOMEN'S BOXING AWARDS

KATIE TAYLOR'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS WERE UNDENIABLE; HER WAR WITH DELFINE PERSOON WAS UNFORGETTABLE

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Katie Taylor

Choosing Ireland's Taylor for this year's award was an easy call. After adding a third lightweight belt to her collection with a stoppage of Rose Volante in March, Taylor unified the title and became The Ring's first female 135-pound champion with a gritty win over fellow pound-for-pound list standout Delfine Persoon in June before winning a 140-pound title in November by beating Christina Linardatou. Combined record of Taylor's 2019 foes on fight night? 69-2.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

Katie Taylor W 10 Delfine Persoon

It may not have received the superfight treatment on the Anthony Joshua-Andy Ruiz undercard at Madison Square Garden, but it deserved it and then delivered on fight night. And no matter who you believe won the pitched 10-round battle between two of the sport's best, it was clear that when it came to skill, grit and drama, Taylor and Persoon both brought it to the Big Apple.

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR »

Lorraine Villalobos KO 4 **Danielle Saldanha**

In women's boxing, the clean, one-punch KO is like Halley's Comet, but Lorraine Villalobos – an atomweight, no less – delivered the best of 2019 when a perfect left hook sent Danielle Saldanha down and out in the fourth round of their June bout in Pico Rivera, California. Six months later, that same hook nearly took out Louisa Hawton in their rematch, but the Aussie banger rose from the deck to take a close decision in Brooklyn.

« UPSET OF THE YEAR

Guadalupe Martinez Guzman SD 10 **Jessica Chavez**

Two years ago, Guadalupe Martinez Guzman sat in this same spot when she ended Zulina Munoz's 34-fight unbeaten streak to take the WBC 115-pound title. Apparently, I was not convinced that Guzman was for real, due to her 14-9 record entering the fight, because here she is again. This time, it's for successfully defending her belt for the third time by beating former Ring Female Fighter of the Year Jessica Chavez in April. Now I'm a believer.

ROUND OF THE YEAR »

Jessica McCaskill-Anahi Ester Sanchez, Round 10

As it turned out on the judges' scorecards, Jessica McCaskill's decision win over Anahi Ester Sanchez in May was already a done deal entering the final round, but both junior welterweights fought as if the fight – and their lives – were on the line. It was the perfect cap to a Fight of the Year candidate, and both fighters truly left it all in the ring in those final two minutes.

« TRAINER OF THE YEAR

Rick Ramos

No one outside of the diehards knew of Jessica McCaskill when she signed to meet Katie Taylor in 2017. Then she gave Taylor one of her toughest fights and everyone was gunning for the Chicago product. That's when things got interesting. Instead of getting comfortable, McCaskill and coach/manager Rick Ramos continued to evolve, and in 2019, a pair of wins over Anahi Ester Sanchez and Erica Anabella Farias put McCaskill on the pound-for-pound list.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR »

Natasha Jonas

Approaching her middle 30s, lightweight Natasha Jonas had a small window for error as a pro, and a 2018 loss to Viviane Obenauf at 130 pounds closed that window even further. But in 2019, the Olympian rebounded with three wins, two by knockout, to put herself back in position to make a run in 2020.

« PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

Adelaida Ruiz

At 31, Los Angeles' "La Cobra" may be a little older than most folks filling this spot, but at 9-0 with legitimate knockout power between 115 and 122 pounds, Ruiz may have the goods to make a run at a title in 2020.

EVENT OF THE YEAR »

Claressa Shields vs Christina Hammer

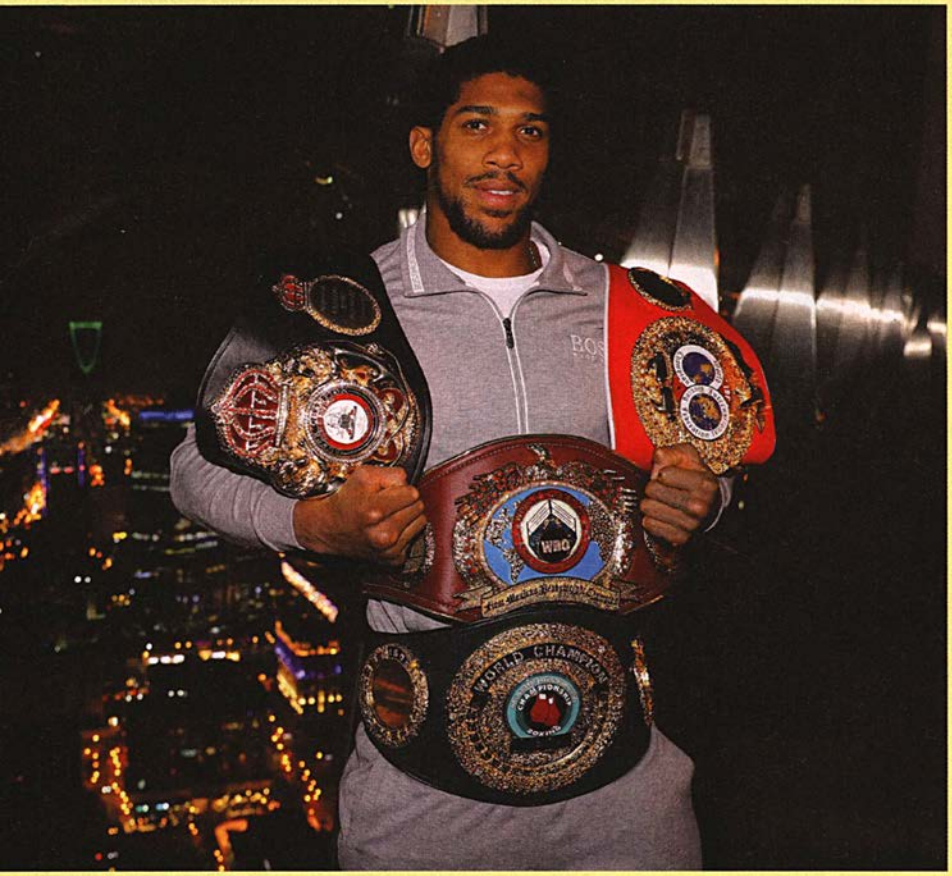
The end result was anticlimactic, as Shields scored a dominant win over Hammer, but the lead-up to the fight had many calling it the biggest fight in the history of women's boxing. And it may have been – at least until the bell rang.

« MOST INSPIRATIONAL

Tiara Brown

Being a professional boxer is a tough gig. Being a police officer in Washington, D.C., takes that degree of difficulty up several notches. But that's just what the 10-0 Tiara Brown does when she's not in the ring, and the junior lightweight's devotion to her community earned her recognition as Officer of the Year in 2019, proving that someone doesn't need a belt to be called a champion.

WORLD BEAT



Anthony Joshua must immediately defend two of his regained heavyweight titles against mandatory challengers.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Anthony Joshua, like a man gorging himself on belts after being on the brink of starvation for six months, seemingly could not decide which title to defend first after reclaiming three portions of the heavyweight crown from Andy Ruiz Jr. in their December dust-up in the dunes of Saudi Arabia. Depending on which way one looked in the subsequent weeks, Joshua and his promoter, Eddie Hearn, were in one moment pledging to defend the IBF crown against its mandatory challenger, Bulgaria's Kubrat Pulev, and in the next, voicing publicly a preference for newly-minted Ukrainian heavyweight Aleksandr Usyk, who holds the same position with the WBO sanctioning body. But perhaps it was all part of their chess game to enhance their pawns on the board so that Joshua will not be forced to give up one of those titles amid the merry-go-round mandatory pile-up madness.

Both the IBF and WBO gave quick orders to Joshua on his mandatory obligations in the wake of redemption against Ruiz, and Hearn, something of a promotional magician, wanted to work a sleight of hand to form an agreement with both sanctioning bodies to ensure Joshua might hold onto both titles. It's doable, of course.

"My question for the governing bodies is, 'Who is first?' Please talk to each other and tell us who is first," Hearn offered through one of his favored internet outlets, IFL TV, in late December. "We don't want to vacate a belt and we believe that we shouldn't have to vacate a belt. When you're a unified champion, there should be an order. I know with the orders that have come in that the IBF is first, but maybe we can't even do a deal with Pulev. Maybe we fight Usyk instead.

"Usyk has the option to fight (Derek) Chisora and then the winner of AJ-Pulev. Or maybe they turn round and say WBO first. Then we'll fight Usyk." And yet, just a couple of days later, Joshua expressed a preference for Usyk over Pulev. "Usyk has achieved more," explained Joshua. "He has a good, solid record. So I'll go with Usyk because of how good he is." In other words, they can't make their mind up which one is best. Truth is, it shouldn't matter. The undisputed unification should be the objective, for the sake of the division, the sport and the many fans who want resolution on who really is the best of the era. Through proof. In a ring, round robin, or by the means we normally decide: that the best fight the best enough times for there to be no debate. Bottom line, though, Hearn has stressed that Joshua "does not have a problem fighting anyone."

While their argument is that Joshua wants to keep the belts in order to create history by becoming the first undisputed champion since Lennox Lewis, the key will be coming to an agreement as soon as possible after February 22, dependent

on the winner between defending WBC titleholder Deontay Wilder and lineal champion Tyson Fury.

The venue, by the way, for Joshua's next fight, likely in April (whoever it is against) could break new ground, too. Joshua's immediate plans are expected to be a return to London – possibly at the home of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club in north London, though Hearn had, incidentally, received numerous offers to stage future bouts elsewhere, including Africa.

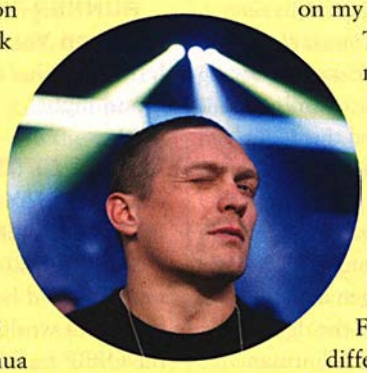
Even Muhammadu Buhari, the president of Nigeria (the homeland of AJ's parents) sent a congratulatory message to Joshua via his official spokesman. The message was profound: "The downfall of a man is truly not the end of his life. There's always another, and better day. This is a lesson we must all learn from you as a country." It was, after all, very much about redemption after that seismic-shock defeat to Ruiz in New York on June 1.

Let us consider just for a moment what Joshua achieved in regaining the IBF, WBA and WBO belts from Ruiz in the 2019 Event of the Year. Joshua became just the fourth heavyweight in history to immediately regain the title in a rematch, after Floyd Patterson (1960), Muhammad Ali (1978) and Lennox Lewis (2001).

I can reveal, too, that Ruiz lost out in more ways than one. I have it on good authority that had Ruiz won the contest, Fury may have stepped aside with a guarantee to fight the winner for the undisputed title between Wilder and Ruiz. All the belts. It was legitimately being discussed. It is now just a mirage for Ruiz.

Yet what boxing fans – and indeed the wider fight world – are now craving is no more delays in 2020 for a megafight to unify all the belts. Or even three megafights to determine the best of the generation. We will require the politics of boxing, rival broadcasters and jockeying egos to be laid aside to make our wishes come to fruition.

But Joshua and Hearn have wrested control of the heavyweight division back for two reasons: They hold 75 percent of the division's baubles and can call the tune in terms of Joshua's draw through numbers. If the Usyk fight is next, that's good. It is a sound fight, that. Joshua stuck to his guns and restrained himself against Ruiz, protecting the china around his chin, though he still looked vulnerable at times in the fight. And in Rounds 4 and 8, there were moments of concern. A high guard and a long, strong jab, occasional right hands and just one uppercut that landed won Joshua at least nine of the rounds comfortably on my card.



Aleksandr Usyk is the mandatory challenger for Joshua's WBO title.

There was a clear method in this camp for the now two-time titleholder. Joshua cautiously protecting his chin is a good thing. His two great rivals – Wilder and Fury – are completely different fighters, and so Joshua creating his own style only advances his cause and his skills. Practice makes perfect. Moreover, there were the fingerprints of a certain Wladimir Klitschko writ large in the patient workmanship of Joshua, who still looked huge for a man weighing just 237 pounds.

Credit to Joshua who has, in my estimation, now grossed over 150 million pounds (about $195 million) in career earnings. Keep going and he will triple that. Destroy all, and he could become a billionaire boxer. What is also worth celebrating with Joshua – just as we have seen of late with Fury – is that he is a role model. Show me the negative stories spilling out on Joshua since he claimed Olympic gold in 2012. They aren't there. Good for him, good for the sport, and his triumph in Saudi Arabia, for all the subplots of a less-than-rosy regime. Joshua resonates for a phalanx of British boxers in his long commercial shadow and on the global boxing scene.

The meeting of Joshua and Fury in a ring anytime soon will be the biggest, greatest fight the U.K. will have ever seen. Arguably the biggest single event ever on British shores, or certainly since England won the football World Cup in 1966.

Joshua is not quite ready for Fury, in my view, nor indeed for Wilder – though that is more of a shoot-out – but a couple more fights to hone the way he fought in a "jab-jab, move, hold" technique will do him no harm. Hearn has no issue with a long wait for the division's biggest clashes. It is a marathon, not a sprint. Though I suspect if Fury wins part two with Wilder, the "Gypsy King" will push immediately for the fight with Joshua, and we will have a behemoth of an event on our hands. Let us pray.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

For more than a decade, Manny Pacquiao and Nonito Donaire had been the standard-bearers of Philippine boxing. Their stars had burned brightest and logically should have burned out by now. Instead, Pacquiao ended the decade the same way he had started it, holding a welterweight title as a nominee for the BWAA Fighter of the Decade award he won 10 years ago. Donaire, 37, showed he still had plenty of fight in him, coming within a punch or two of putting pound-for-pound candidate Naoya Inoue on the floor in their November unification bout.

There was plenty of action below that level, with Jerwin Ancajas rebounding from a disappointing

ETHAN MILLER

2018 to earn two knockout wins to push his IBF junior bantamweight title defense count to eight. Vic Saludar lost his WBO strawweight title to Wilfredo Mendez in Puerto Rico this past August but was quickly replaced by Pedro Taduran, who knocked out Samuel Salva to win the vacant IBF 105-pound belt a few weeks later in what was the third all-Filipino world title fight of the past two years.

Few fighters in the Philippines are riding as high as John Riel Casimero, whose up-and-down career reached new heights with his shocking KO of Zolani Tete to win another world title on the road.

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR:
JOHN RIEL CASIMERO

It wasn't unreasonable to assume that Casimero was a spent force after his surprising 2017 loss to Jonas Sultan. His career seemed to be stalled out, and he was out of the ring for nearly a year afterward. Around that time, Sean Gibbons, his old matchmaker pal, had ascended to the top of MP Promotions and brought Casimero into the fold. Using his connections, Gibbons, a modern day Frank Churchill, resurrected Casimero's career, beginning with a 12th-round knockout of Ricardo Espinoza in April to win the interim WBO bantamweight title. Then Casimero had a nice homecoming bout in August with a knockout of Cesar Ramirez in Manila. The reason we're talking about Casimero here is what happened at the end of November, when Casimero spent the first two rounds in Birmingham, England, getting the measure of the much taller Zolani Tete before dropping the hammer on the South African. A perfectly timed right hand dropped Tete to all fours. From that point, it was a matter of how much punishment the ref would allow Tete to absorb, and the fight was stopped shortly after.

Casimero joins Pacquiao, Donaire and Nietes as the only Filipinos to win world titles in at least three divisions. He appears to be on course for an even bigger 2020, with a showdown with Inoue being looked at. At 29-4 (20 KOs), Casimero's record isn't the most aesthetically pleasing, but that's because he's not afraid to fight anyone or travel anywhere to do so. But if we pay closer attention to his boxing and not just his BoxRec, history will smile favorably on his legacy.

John Riel Casimero had a banner year in 2019.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR:
MANNY PACQUIAO SD 12 KEITH THURMAN

Prior to this one, I saw messages of genuine concern by some Pacquiao fans who feared the aging warrior would be hurt in this bout. Concerns about his readiness were allayed moments into the first, when a right hand from Pacquiao put the decade-younger Thurman down. Thurman wouldn't lose his "0" easily and came back in the middle rounds to put some serious punishment on Pacquiao with heavy right hands. Heading into the late rounds in Las Vegas on July 20, the fight was there on the table for both men. That's when, in Round 10, Pacquiao found the sweet spot between the rib and hip on Thurman's right side, slamming a left hand into his liver that put the Floridian on his bicycle and compelled him to spit out his mouthpiece as he sought to recover. Pacquiao walked away with a split decision win and the WBA title, completing the resurrection of his career under Premier Boxing Champions.

RUNNER-UP: Inoue-Donaire - Inoue entered the 118-pound championship bout appearing invulnerable. He left with a broken nose and a broken orbital bone, but also with the World Boxing Super Series bantamweight tournament victory. In defeat, Donaire cemented himself as a braveheart warrior and raised his esteem among fight fans.

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR:
ROLDAN ALDEA KO 8 MIKHAIL ALEXEEV

For seven-and-a-half rounds on July 13 in Ekaterinburg, Russia, the previously unbeaten Alexeev marched in with no defense against Aldea's left uppercut. Then, the dam finally broke and Alexeev collapsed face-first onto the canvas, no count necessary. It was a stunning result for the southpaw Aldea, who had lost all six of his previous fights abroad. The win avenges Romero Duno's 2016 loss to Alexeev.

RUNNER-UP: Donaire KO 6 Stephon Young - Donaire plus left hook plus chin still equals 'good night.'

UPSET OF THE YEAR:
JOE NOYNAY TKO 6 SATOSHI SHIMIZU

Shimizu, a 2012 Olympic bronze medalist, had been on the fast track to a world title shot, winning the OPBF featherweight title and stopping all of his opponents. That was before he ran into Joe Noynay, a fellow southpaw on the Murata-Brant II card on July 12 in Osaka. Noynay showed no respect from the opening bell, dropping Shimizu twice in the opening round with straight lefts, swelling the right side of his face badly, before Shimizu turned his back in Round 6 to signal he had had enough. Noynay, of Bogo, Cebu, was invited back to Japan in December, holding Kenichi Ogawa to a technical draw in five rounds.

GHOST OF THE YEAR:
DONNIE NIETES

Nietes said there was "no point" in facing Aston Palicte once again after their draw the year prior and vacated the WBO junior bantamweight title in

March. What happened instead was that the rest of the division figured there was "no point" in facing Nietes, a high risk-low reward fighter, if he didn't have a belt. The year came and went without Nietes appearing in the ring. At age 37, and after years of fighting for relevance, it was a stall in momentum he could ill afford. The highest-profile move "Ahas" made in 2019 was appearing at the WBO convention in Japan, which could presage another title run in 2020.

AMATEUR OF THE YEAR:
EUMIR MARCIAL AND NESTHY PETECIO

This normally isn't an award I hand out, but it's a well-deserved laurel for both Marcial and Petecio, who captured headlines and hearts with their respective runs at the AIBA World Championships. In Russia, Marcial tore through the competition with his southpaw power-punching, dominating in the prelims before putting a beating on Kazakhstani Tursynbay Kulakhmet in the semis. He fell short in the gold medal match, losing a 5-0 decision, but became the third Filipino male to earn silver at the Worlds, following Harry Tanamor (2007) and Roel Velasco (1997).

The best finish of the year came from Petecio, the Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, veteran who earned gold in October, defeating Russian Liudmila Vorontsova by a 3-2 decision to follow in the footsteps of Josie Gabuco, who earned gold at the 2012 tournament.

Marcial, 24, fell just short of Olympic qualification in 2016 but appears to have matured into a real medal threat. Petecio, 27, will have the benefit of an added featherweight division in the 2020 Games, making them two to watch in Tokyo.

Both Marcial and Petecio were among the seven Filipinos to win boxing gold at the SEA Games – domination, just as anticipated.

Ryan Songalia is based in New York City and can be reached at ryansongalia@gmail.com.

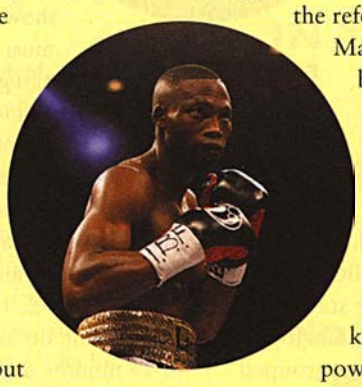
SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

WBO bantamweight champion Zolani Tete had to live with the frustration of pulling out of his fight against Nonito Donaire in the WBSS semifinal last year due to a shoulder injury, but then things got worse. After over a year out of the ring, he had to face mandatory challenger John Riel Casimero, himself a former two-weight titleholder, in Birmingham, U.K.

The first two rounds were uneventful, with Tete trying to establish his southpaw jab and Casimero looking for an opening, but then all hell broke loose in the third.

Casimero closed the gap and landed two successive short rights on Tete's temple that promptly deposited him on the canvas. When Tete got up, it was clear that he didn't have his legs under him and Casimero went after him. Tete attempted to grab his opponent but was flung to the canvas. He got up, but Casimero scored a second knockdown with his follow-up attack. Once again, Tete made it back to his feet, but he simply couldn't keep Casimero at bay. Helpless against the ropes, a final left hook by Casimero convinced the referee to wave the fight over at the 2:14 mark.



Zolani Tete's bantamweight title reign came to an end in 2019.

It was an impressive performance by Casimero, who showed that he belongs among the elite of Filipino fighters.

This was a heartbreaking loss for Tete, but he has been here before. It will be a hard road back, but perhaps he has another run left in him.

★★★

Junior bantamweight Athenkosi Dumezweni, fresh off a signature win over Jonas Sultan, took on unbeaten 10-0 Olympian Fernando Daniel Martinez of Argentina in East London, South Africa, in a 12-rounder on December 16.

Martinez came out aggressively from the opening bell. Fighting in a crouch, he took some southpaw lefts from Dumezweni, but when he nailed Dumezweni with a short right, the South African went down. He was up, but Martinez staggered him again with more rights as the bell rang.

From the second round, Dumezweni started clawing his way back into the fight, establishing the distance with his jab and landing straight lefts and the odd uppercut on the move. Dumezweni had a good Round 4 when a right uppercut appeared to drop Martinez, but the referee ruled it a slip.

Martinez kept pushing, but Dumezweni also managed to open a cut above the Argentine's right eye. In the fifth, Dumezweni landed a great right uppercut-left hook combination, and although Martinez kept rallying back with power punches on the inside, the South African seemed to be edging the fight. Dumezweni had a big Round 7, picking the advancing Martinez off from the outside.

Dumezweni appeared to deflate in the eighth when Martinez staged a strong rally, ripping hooks to the body and head. Martinez sent Dumezweni down again in the 10th with a right but was penalized a point for landing some glancing blows as Dumezweni slumped to the canvas. The writing was on the wall as Dumezweni got up, but he was saved by the bell as Martinez teed off with vicious combinations.

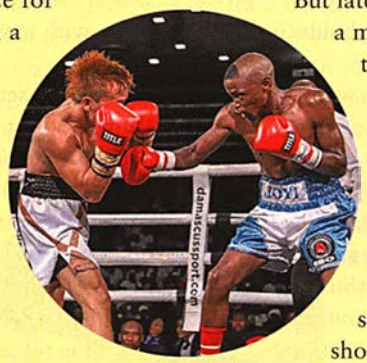
At the start of the 11th, Martinez put Dumezweni in the corner and kept punching until his opponent

sank to the canvas, forcing the stoppage at the 0:23 mark to score his first significant win as a pro.

Fernando Daniel Martinez is for real!

★★★

It was up to Nkosinathi Joyi, who took on Filipino Joey Canoy in a strawweight 12-rounder on the same card, to save face for the South Africans. In a battle of southpaws, the former IBF titleholder was in fine form against the dangerous Canoy, boxing well behind his thudding jab and trademark combinations to the body with a straight left thrown in for good measure.



Strawweight veteran Nkosinathi Joyi (right) remains a contender.

Although he struggled to win rounds, Canoy was always in the fight, landing some hard right hooks and following up with his straight left. He started the fifth with a big rally, but Joyi simply took a step back, regrouped and went back in, outworking and outfighting Canoy with his superior technique and work rate. The crowd was on its feet, chanting and singing in what was a terrific round.

Canoy had his best round in the eighth, when he found some spring in his legs and punched on the fly. He even had Joyi on his heels with a straight left-right hook combination in the ninth, but Joyi had banked too many rounds by then and kept coming back stronger. Both exchanged big shots in the final round, but Joyi was just better, winning by scores of 117-111, 119-109 and 117-112.

At the age of 36, the unlikely comeback of Nkosinathi Joyi continues.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

When it comes to boxing in Canada, the venue that is synonymous with the biggest fights is the Bell Center in Montreal. The biggest attractions in recent years, including Jean Pascal, Lucian Bute and Adonis Stevenson, had always attracted throngs of boisterous supporters when they fought there.

But lately, there hasn't been a marquee matchup that would warrant staging a show at the city's glitziest venue.

However, on December 10, Eye of the Tiger Management staged a card showcasing many of its most talented fighters alongside its up-and-coming prospects. In the main event, favorite hometown son David Lemieux (41-4, 34 KOs) made his super middleweight debut against Ukrainian veteran Maksym Bursak (35-6-2, 16 KOs). Lemieux was coming off an extended layoff of 15 months due to a hand injury and a middleweight bout that was canceled because of his severe dehydration in attempting to make the 160-pound limit.

Although Bursak had been in there with some top talent, including Gilberto Ramirez, Martin Murray and Hassan N'Dam, he lost all of those fights and wasn't expected to trouble Lemieux as much as he did. The Montreal native had to overcome knockdowns in the first and fifth rounds to secure the split decision victory. Despite Lemieux's tactical shortcomings, he demonstrated resolve in overcoming the two knockdowns and put Bursak down in the sixth, then clearly dominated the final round.

With Lemieux turning 31 at the end of December, an important decision needs to be made to maximize the remainder of his career. Hardly an oversized middleweight standing at roughly 5-foot-10 with a 70-inch reach, his team has to determine if competing against bigger foes is worth the reward of lessening the struggle of fighting at 160. Regardless of what weight class he remains in, Lemieux needs to be more active to avoid any devastating setbacks like the one he narrowly avoided against Bursak.

"Our biggest mistake was to leave him 15 months without boxing," said Camille Estephan, president of Eye of the Tiger. "We had a date in September, but the negotiations stumbled. It delayed everything. It's difficult for a boxer to motivate himself in training when you do not have a date and an opponent. David is very conscientious; he does everything he has to do. But training to train is not the same thing."

On the undercard, some of Canada's best young talent was on display. One of the most intriguing heavyweight prospects in the world, Arslanbek "The Lion" Makhmudov (10-0, 10 KOs), added to his terrifying reputation with a vicious first-round stoppage of former titleholder Samuel Peter (38-9, 31 KOs), who is competing well past his prime and resembled nothing like his "Nigerian Nightmare" moniker. Further heavyweight action saw Canadian Simon "The Grizzly" Kean (18-1, 17 KOs) knock off faded veteran Siarhei Liakhovich (27-8, 17 KOs) by 10th-round stoppage after a mostly lackluster affair.

Also, junior flyweight contender Kim Clavel improved to 11-0 (2 KOs) after shutting out Esmeralda Gaona Sagahon (7-4) over 10 rounds to claim the NABF belt. Clavel continues to impress with her skillset, and a world title shot in 2020 looks well within her reach. Two more of Quebec's rapidly rising stars banked some valuable rounds, as Sadriddin Akhmedov (11-0, 10 KOs) and Lexson Mathieu (8-0, 7 KOs) both scored victories inside the distance. Akhmedov, a forceful junior

middleweight from Kazakhstan who now calls Montreal home, remained composed amid showboating antics from his opponent, Jose Antonio Villalobos, and secured a highlight-reel finish in the seventh round. Equally impressive was "The Next" Mathieu, who was forced to work hard by his tough journeyman opponent, Rolando Paredes (16-9-2, 11 KOs) of Mexico. This was a valuable step in Mathieu's development, as he had to show his boxing skills and ability to fight going backward. At only 20 years old, the sky truly is the limit for Mathieu, who looks to be Quebec's next homegrown champion.

★★★

Other members of the EOTM stable were in action in December as Yves Ulysse Jr. (18-2, 9 KOs) and Erik Bazinyan (24-0, 18 KOs) competed a week apart in California. Both are co-promoted by Golden Boy and are being given a chance to showcase their talent and build a following in the American market. However, only one of them was able to do that in their latest showing. Bazinyan ended Saul Roman's (46-14, 38 KOs) night early courtesy of a piston-like counter right hand in the third round. Bazinyan had been nailing Roman with the right all night and used one more to ice his opponent decisively.

In stark contrast to Bazinyan's performance, Ulysse completely underwhelmed in what was supposed to be a showcase fight against Ismael Barroso (22-3-2, 20 KOs) of Venezuela. Ulysse never got out of first gear and was continuously overwhelmed by the nonstop punching of the former title challenger. Punch stats indicated that Barroso more than doubled Ulysse's output and outlanded him as well. Many of those landed shots targeted Ulysse's body, causing the Canadian to slow down as the fight progressed. Equally as impressive was the heavy-handed Venezuelan's endless gas tank; it was he who pushed the pace in the championship rounds, determined not to rest on his laurels.

After 12 rounds, Barroso was rightfully awarded the unanimous decision, handing Ulysse the second loss of his pro career. Before the bout, the Montreal native was eyeing a title shot against champion Josh Taylor. However, those plans were dashed by this considerable setback. And while 31 isn't old, the clock is ticking if Ulysse is to earn a crack at a belt while still in his athletic prime. He can't afford another doldrum like the one that preceded this bout. More than just staying active, he needs to string together a series of wins against quality opposition to regain his standing as a top contender in the talent-rich junior welterweight division.

★★★

Groupe Yvon Michel, the other major promoter on the Quebec scene, recently announced that they will be partnering with Boxing Canada to stage five pro-am cards in 2020 at the Montreal Casino. Each show will include a handful of Canadian National Team members in matches against the top amateurs from around the world, including Puerto Rico, the United States, France and Italy. There will also be 4-6 professional bouts on each card, which will allow fans to see talents such as Wilfrid Seyi, Francis Lafreniere, Ayaz Hussain and Terry Osias, as per the press release.

"This partnership is certainly one of the most exciting announcements in decades," said Pat Fiacco, President of Boxing Canada. "This opportunity will allow national team athletes to demonstrate their Olympic boxing talent at the highest international level, in front of professional boxing fans as well as broadcast viewers. These recurring events will certainly generate exponential visibility for our Olympic hopefuls and our sport."

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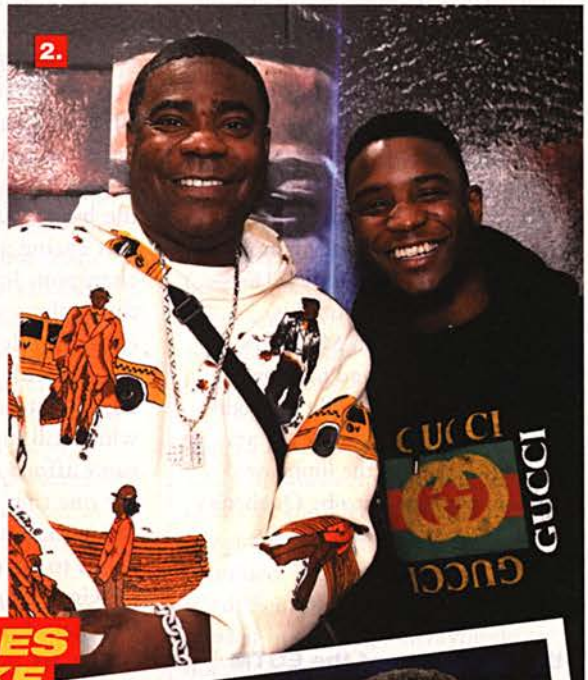
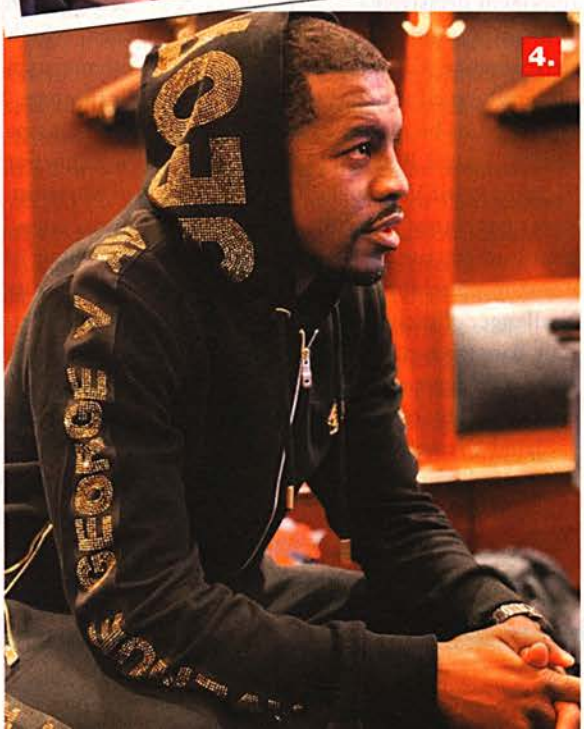


STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

At The Fights for Crawford vs. Kavaliauskas (Madison Square Garden, NYC): 1. Rapper Fat Joe (left) and DJ Pretty Lou 2. Comedian Tracy Morgan (left) and boxer Christopher Colbert 3. Champions Teofimo Lopez and Shakur Stevenson 4. Champion Jamel Herring 5. Top Rank Ring Card Girls



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SUPREME JINX

Following five successful defenses of the WBA light heavyweight title, Michael Spinks (left) signed on for a unification fight against WBC counterpart and Ring Magazine champion Dwight Muhammad Qawi on March 18, 1983, at the Convention Center in Atlantic City. In a bout dubbed "The Brawl for it All," Spinks built up an early lead before suffering a questionable knockdown in Round 8. Qawi, fighting under his original name of Braxton, picked up some of the late sessions on aggression, but Spinks did enough to claim a 15-round unanimous decision and emerged as the undisputed light heavyweight champion of the world.

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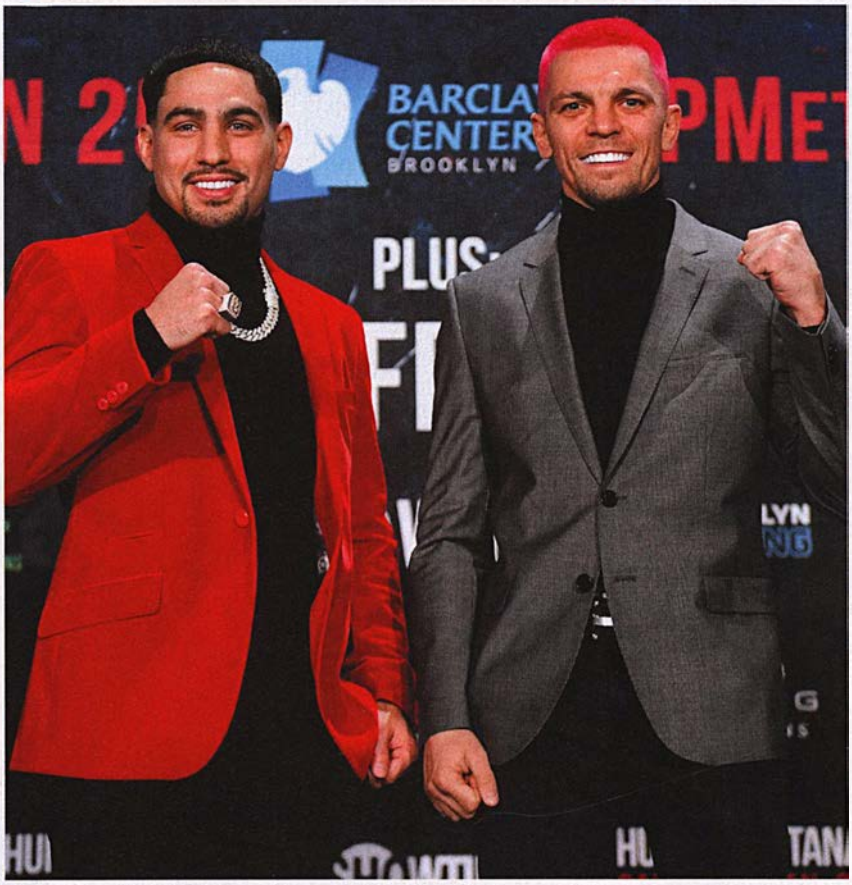

Ivan Redkach (right) isn't expected to threaten Danny Garcia, but the Ukrainian underdog wasn't going to be outdone in the fashion department during the press conference.

JANUARY

JAN. 18 – Eleider Alvarez vs. Michael Seals, light heavyweights, Verona, New York (ESPN+).

JAN. 18 – Julian Williams vs. Jeison Rosario, junior middleweights (for Williams' IBF/WBA titles), Philadelphia (Fox).

JAN. 25 – Danny Garcia vs. Ivan Redkach, welterweights, Brooklyn, New York (Showtime). Also, Jarrett Hurd vs. Francisco Santana, junior middleweights.

JAN. 30 – Tevin Farmer vs. Joseph Diaz, junior lightweights (for Farmer's IBF title), Miami (DAZN). Also, Demetrius Andrade vs. Luke Keeler, middleweights (for Andrade's WBO title); Daniel Roman vs. Murodjon Akhmadaliev, junior featherweights (for Roman's IBF/WBA titles).

FEBRUARY

FEB. 1 – Jose Ramirez vs. Viktor Postol, junior welterweights (for Ramirez's WBC/WBO titles), Haikou, China (ESPN).

FEB. 1 – Yordenis Ugas vs. Mike Dallas Jr., welterweights, Biloxi, Miss. (Fox Sports 1).

FEB. 8 – Kell Brook vs. Mark DeLuca, junior middleweights, Sheffield, U.K. (DAZN, Sky). Also, Kid Galahad vs. Claudio Marrero, featherweights; Eva Wahlstrom vs. Terri Harper, junior lightweights (for Wahlstrom's WBC title).

FEB. 8 – Gary Russell Jr. vs. Tugstsogt Nyambayar, featherweights (for Russell's WBC title), Allentown, Penn. (Showtime).

FEB. 22 – Deontay Wilder vs. Tyson Fury, heavyweights (for vacant Ring championship and Wilder's WBC title), Las Vegas (ESPN/Fox PPV).

FEB. 29 – Mikey Garcia vs. Jessie Vargas, welterweights, Frisco, Texas (DAZN).

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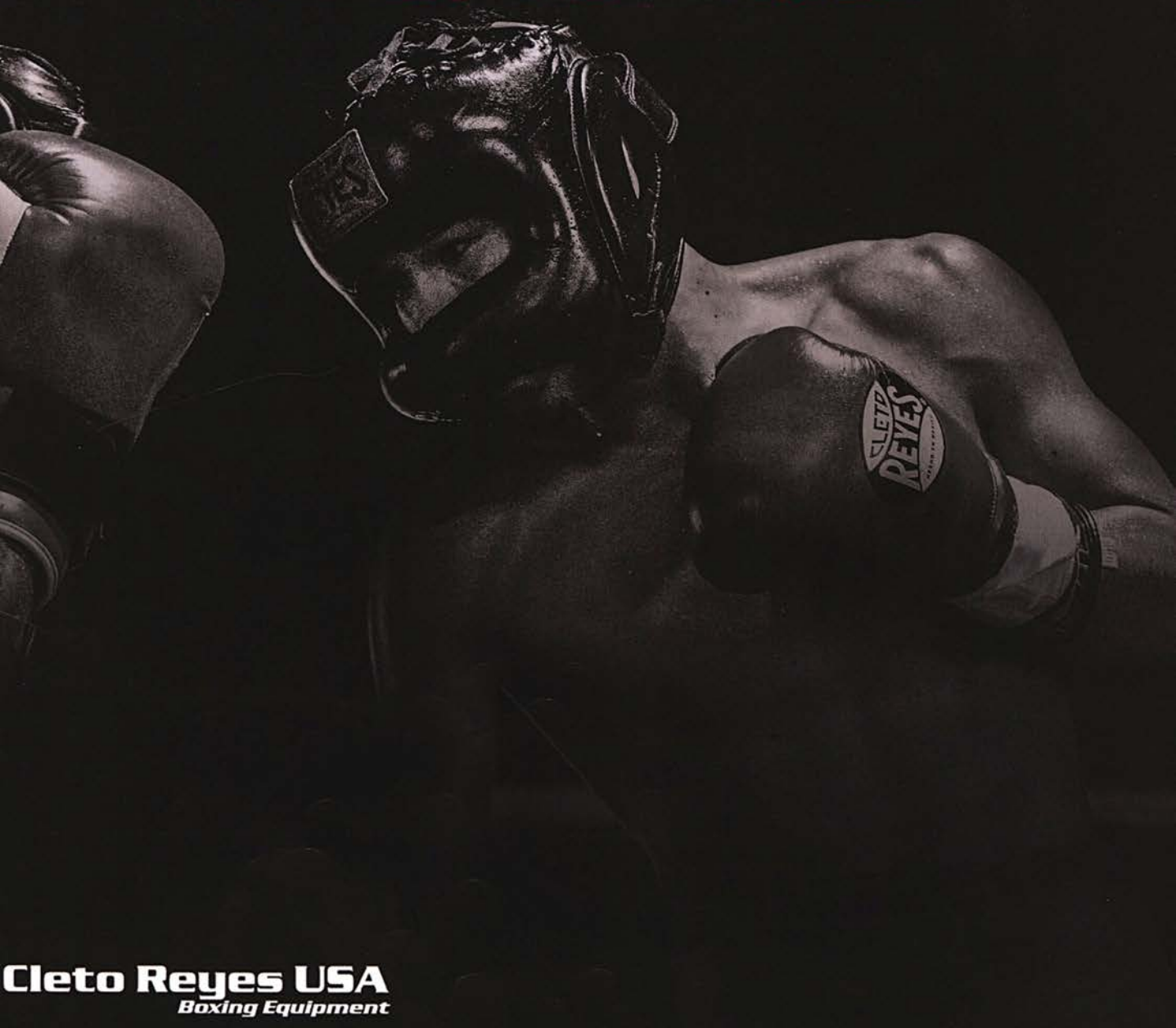

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